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BASIL GODFREY'S CAPRICE.

BY HOLME LEE,

Author of "Sylvan Holt's Daughter," "Mr. Wynyard's Ward."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

SMITH, ELDER AND CO., LONDON.

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CONTENTS OF VOL. II.



	PAGE
XXV. THE FIRST LOVE-LETTER	1
XXVI. WHINMORE	8
XXVII. BASIL GODFREY TO JOAN ABBOTT	23
XXVIII. UNCLE AND NEPHEW	34
XXIX. JOAN ABBOTT TO BASIL GODFREY	55
XXX. A MIDSUMMER MORNING.....	66
XXXI. THE PORTRAIT PICTURE	80
XXXII. A COURSE OF READING LESSONS	95
XXXIII. A NIGHT AT THE PLAY	124
XXXIV. CUPID VERSUS MINERVA	132
XXXV. LOVE'S CROSS PURPOSES	145
XXXVI. MODERN AMUSEMENTS ..	159

	PAGE
XXXVII. THE DISTRACTED LOVER.....	176
XXXVIII. A WOMAN'S AMBITION.....	189
XXXIX. ANOTHER STEP UP THE LADDER	204
XL. "A YOUNG LADY OF OUR FAMILY"	212
XLI. IN A GARDEN OF EDEN	225
XLII. A SUMMONS HOME	243
XLIII. JOAN'S COMING HOME AGAIN.....	252
XLIV. QUIET CHANGES.....	265
XLV. FALSE ENCHANTMENTS	280
XLVI. ON A WINTER'S NIGHT	289
XLVII. THE CLOUDS RETURN AFTER THE RAIN	298
XLVIII. A LITTLE RIFT	327

BASIL GODFREY'S CAPRICE.

XXV.

THE FIRST LOVE-LETTER.

THE very next day brought forth an event that promised to put quite another face on the fortunes of Basil Godfrey. Hitherto he had been but "the landscape-painter;" now he became almost the "Lord of Burleigh." Two deaths, terrible and simultaneous, opened him the way to a great inheritance.

At eleven in the morning he had seen the carriage drive off from the crow's-nest with the blind curate, his mother and Joan inside; he had seen Mistress Abbott returning home in tears; he had seen the master, his brown visage

puckered with grief, lead her into the cottage and shut the door; and then he went wandering down to the cattle-bridge, to think his thoughts, to feel his regrets, and balance his *ifs* against the invincible facts of life. *She* was gone, and he had not been able to tell her that he loved her; he had not been able to require of her a pledge that she would keep her love true and sealed to him. *If* he had taken courage to speak, *if* he had bound himself and her by a formal promise, would it not have been well? A man honestly, earnestly in love falls back into the age of innocence. His late prudences, his sister's warnings were forgotten. He would write to Joan a little letter—and on the parapet of the cattle-bridge he wrote it; a few pencil lines on a leaf torn from his pocket-book.

“You were not out of sight when I longed to call you back: to tell you in three words what I tried to tell you often without speech. Do you understand that I love you, Joan?—that with my whole soul and strength I love you? I would call you ‘Sweetheart’ if I might. So have I dreamed of you since the evening when I found

you waiting on the cattle-bridge, whither I have come now to think of you and get rid of myself. If I have won any warm little corner in your remembrance, keep me there until we meet again.

“And when shall that next meeting be? I am free as air—could sling on my knapsack and follow you within the hour—if I dared. You are gentle and cordial:—would you bid me welcome if I dropt down on you some day unawares, all dusty and weary after a long tramp in my vocation? Dearest, do not you deny me the belief that I read your heart truly in your true eyes, and that you love me a little who love you so much.

“Our fortunes are equal—we have neither of us any but what God’s grace gives. I would not exchange my poverty for store of gold because you are poor of money too—but in all else how rich!

“Perhaps you will not write to me? But I shall write to you often unless you forbid me; and though I should write on the dullest day of November it will feel like May for the fresh, sunny, spiritual presence of you in my heart. You have done me good, and made me in love

with goodness. You have been to my fancy like a sweet breeze blowing through a heated room.

“This is a torn leaf—I wish Zephyrus would blow it into your lap; lucky leaf that you would take up tenderly, as you would any waif, for you are full of charity; but this, let me hope, *most* tenderly, because you would know that it came from your friend, Basil.”

To Zephyrus, however, the lover did not commit his message, but to the post, duly addressed to a certain hotel at Rouen where the travellers were to make their first rest on their journey.

It was in the self-same bright and golden hour, while Basil Godfrey stood writing his letter on the cattle-bridge, that a sudden squall swept over Loch Rannoch, and upset a boat wherein were two young men, brothers, his cousins. Both went down, and two dead corpses were all the sons left that night to Colonel Godfrey of Whinmore.

Three days had elapsed ere the news reached Ashford Rectory, and it came then through the public prints. Mr. Franklyn had *The Times*, and he read it there. They were all seated at break-

fast—the rector, his wife and children, and Basil Godfrey. His wife saw the rector's countenance change, and asked what had happened.

“Another of those fatal catastrophes which have made the succession to Whinmore so swift and irregular,” said he, and handed the paper to Basil.

There was a pause of silence until he had read the paragraph, and his sister after him. Then: “What a sad, sad tragedy!” cried she. “Oh! the poor bereaved father! Basil, you ought to go to him.”

“But where is he? At Whinmore or Rannoch? In London or in Paris? He was in London last week. I should prefer to wait for a summons, Nelly. It is years since I have seen him, and he did not love me then.”

Nelly appeared to think this hard of Basil; but the rector quietly said it would be best to wait, and in the meanwhile to ascertain the truth of the report. “Yes, it may not be correct,” suggested Nelly. “There is always some exaggeration in the newspaper stories of accidents.”

"I wish from my soul this may prove all exaggeration!" added her brother fervently; and pushing away his cup and plate he walked out into the blooming garden.

But there was no exaggeration—the report was true, and all the glorious morning he could not help figuring the scene to himself. He knew the bonny loch under the big shadow of the Grampians, and the rude shooting-box where perhaps his luckless young kinsmen lay stark in death.

"They will bury the boys at Whinmore," thought he—they were only boys when they met last; and Basil had incurred his uncle's displeasure by leading them into some wild boyish mischief, where the younger of the two sustained a grievous injury to his effeminate beauty by breaking the bridge of his nose—poor, pretty Bertie, who had been like his mother! The widowed colonel could not forgive his rattle-pate of a nephew, and he sent him away from Whinmore in disgrace. Basil had never seen the place since, and now he was the heir; for every rood of it was entailed. A change of prospect truly, when less than a week

ago all his fortune was vested in his brains and a gold pen with a silver case !

And on this memorable morning while Basil Godfrey went mooning and ruminating about the rectory garden at Ashford, Joan Abbott in Rouen had found his beautiful, his precious letter. Ah, how she blushed and brightened over it. "From whom is it?" inquired Mrs. Paget, and Joan's shy, startled look betrayed the secret. The old lady was disconcerted, and invoked a plague on Basil. Since he had held his peace till now, why could he not curb his pen? or if write he must, why could he not burn the letter when his feelings were relieved! It was clear that he had written Joan a love-letter; for she did not propose to make it common property; she did not quote a word of news from it, or give any message of polite regards. It was her own peculiar treasure, and divided her thoughts all day with the beauties and antiquities of Rouen. She did not answer it, but she put it in a silk case, and wore it for an amulet—a charm against fatigue, dulness and all the *ennuies* that absence from those we love best is heir to.

XXVI.

WHINMORE.

WHINMORE had come into the hands of Colonel Godfrey by means of a tragedy as dire as that which had made him childless. He was in India when the then head of the family, whose life was no credit to it, was killed at Baden-Baden in a duel fought to settle a gambling-house quarrel. He had sons, but no heir nearer than his cousin—a subaltern in a regiment recently drafted off for service in India. The lucky young soldier of fortune effected an exchange and came home, but did not retire on half-pay until he had purchased the steps to a colonelcy. Then he married, and settled at Whinmore to fulfil his duties as the owner of a very large, very ancient and strictly entailed estate. His heir was his younger brother,

an unbeneficed clergyman in the diocese of Oxford, but already the proud father of two children—Ellen and Basil. In due course of time, the colonel's wife brought him two children also—both sons—enough to relieve all fears about the direct succession. When the elder was about fourteen their mother died. Since that event the colonel had led an easy, desultory life between the German Spas and Paris, London and Whinmore, keeping on excellent terms with his boys, providing them liberally with the best means of education and amusement, but never making them part and parcel of his happiness, or feeling himself essential to theirs. They were aged respectively one-and-twenty and nineteen at the time of their disastrous deaths.

It would be a mistake to suppose that Colonel Godfrey did not suffer a real and acute sorrow for his children, loosely as he had held by their affection. It was his way when bored or vexed at his present existence to indulge in a day-dream of retirement to Whinmore, and in all such day-dreams he had the cheerful company of his boys

— honest, well-bred young fellows who only wanted seasoning to be the best company in the world.

Tidings of their calamity were brought to him in Paris, whither he had only just gone from England. That night he set out to return to Whinmore. The bodies of his children had been brought thither from the north, and were lying coffined in state when he arrived. “Good God,” he said, “I cannot bear to see them !” and broke down completely from the strength of his manhood. It had aged the colonel ten years, said his own man—the confidential servant of all his life since he succeeded to the property.

First he felt the natural regret that *living* he had not made more of them, and that *dead* the past was irredeemable. His self-reproaches were not very keen, for he believed that he had done his paternal duty by them thoroughly ; but his regrets were poignant that he had not loved them better, and engaged their love. It had seemed no great matter, this love, while they were here, but now they were gone, all else seemed nothing worth

in comparison of it. Bertie, especially, had been an affectionate little lad ; but the affection had dwindled out of sight—ah ! if he could but recover it ! Each year since his wife's death the colonel had been less and less with them. The elder son Reginald had given him no trouble or anxiety of any sort. He was studious and well-conducted at school and college ; at Whinmore he was popular as a kind-spoken master, a good rider, and fair shot. He had in him the making of an excellent squire and country gentleman, and a more agreeable, promising heir man could not desire. And now his shoes were empty, and his cousin Basil must step into them—that wild young scapegrace who had suffered rustication, and had vagabondized all over Europe as a newspaper correspondent !

His reminiscences of Basil as a handsome harum-scarum were a distinct element in Colonel Godfrey's distress, but he did not neglect the observances due to him as the new heir.

“ My nephew must be sent for, Gibbs,” he said to his man on the night of their arrival.

“He ought to be present at the funeral, as he is in the country. Let Sanders know.”

“Mr. Godfrey is come, sir, and is at Mr. Sanders’ house. Mr. Sanders wrote as he’d better come, to be on the spot if you wanted him,” replied the servant.

The colonel smiled bitterly—thought the steward was in haste to curry favour with the new heir, and that the heir himself appeared willing to take time by the forelock. It was the way of the world all over, and he was himself too worldly-wise to resent it. “Then he had better come up here,” rejoined he. “Mrs. Beste will understand what rooms he ought to have.”

Mrs. Beste understood perfectly, and Basil Godfrey was put in possession, not of the “young squire’s” rooms, but of others as commodious. *He* was the young squire now, inheritor of all the honour and respect of his predecessors, and the servants at Whinmore were not slow in rendering their duty where their interests also lay.

Basil had been prone all his life to deride luxury, and to say the more servants a man had the more

masters—this, his theoretical wisdom, was now to bear the test of experience. He had slept well on the bare ground, with his knapsack under his head, but he slept none the less well on his down pillow under fine draperies of purple silk. He had the faculty of bringing his mind on a level with circumstances soon. His vivid imagination and warm generous heart made his sorrow for his cousins no sham, but it is nevertheless true that when he awoke in the morning, surrounded with novel splendours, he felt as much at home in their fortunes as if he had been born to them. Nor was Gibbs' respectful service disagreeable, nor the solemn reverence of the grey-headed butler who marshalled him to the small library where breakfast was spread for him alone. The colonel would breakfast by himself, he said, and the guests bidden to the funeral would assemble in the banquet-room. The funeral was to set out at eleven o'clock, and would be over before noon.

Basil had not yet seen his uncle, nor did he see him until he appeared to take his place in the procession as chief mourner. He looked haggard

and grief-worn, but he had recovered his strength, and was full of manly composure, erect and soldier-like as in his best days. Basil's temperament made him liable to sudden onsets of emotion, and a womanish dew obscured his eyes as the colonel grasped his hand in silence. The bereaved father was surprised, touched, infected, by the genuineness of this emotion. He took Basil's arm, and leant on it heavily as they followed at a slow march after the two coffins which were carried shoulder-height by picked men of the tenantry.

With all due sacrifice of prayers and tears the two dead sons of Whinmore were laid side by side in the family vault under the chancel of the church, and going home again the ceremonial mourners talked in whispers of the new heir who had borne a more sorrowful countenance than any. Everybody talked of the new heir; the colonel himself talked of him to his man of business; and the man of business understood that the colonel had put away former prejudices, had taken to his nephew, and would accord him all

the honours and privileges of his position like another son.

And in exchange for these honours and privileges Basil would doubtless have to barter much of his cherished personal independence. Before Colonel Godfrey opened his counsel to his nephew many thoughts passed through his mind. He would do his utmost duty by him; he would make him a liberal allowance—the same allowance as he had made to his son Reginald since his majority. That would be necessary since Basil had no private fortune, and no profession but that of journalist, which in the colonel's estimation was worse than none—a desultory, disreputable makeshift. He must give up that, of course; the heir to Whinmore would have no need to earn his bread as a working man-of-letters. If he was ambitious, let him go into Parliament. It did not occur to Colonel Godfrey, accustomed to the obedience of his sons, that his nephew could possibly have the will or desire to gainsay any of his plans; that he could possibly prefer his old paths to the new ones death had opened to him.

But Basil Godfrey was a man who inclined decidedly to living his life according to himself, and who never would live it according to anybody else. Time and circumstance might modify, might change, his present views, but the sudden accession to wealth could not wrench him violently away from them. He and his kinsman had leisure enough for reflection given them before they spoke. On the day succeeding the funeral the colonel fell ill, not dangerously, but tediously, and for more than a week saw only the doctor and Gibbs. Basil during this time had to entertain himself as he could, and to avoid whatever appearances censoriousness might misinterpret. He wandered about the park a good deal with his hands in his pockets at first, and then with a sketch-book and case of moist colours; and in his wanderings saw much fine timber. Some heirs would have calculated its money's worth; he considered only its picturesque effect, broken into clumps, or stretching into dim mysterious glades and vistas.

Whinmore was a place famous amongst artists and archæologists as one of the most ancient and

best preserved manor houses in England. It was neither too vast nor too splendid for the comfort of every-day modern life. Colonel Godfrey's predecessor in possession had restored the external fabric, the castellated gateway-tower, the inner and outer courts, the chapel, stables, offices, terraces, and gardens, not removing a stone of the original; and Colonel Godfrey had imitated his pious care in the restoration and re-decoration of the domestic apartments: spending two years' time and two years' income upon them.

And very beautiful these apartments were—the more beautiful and chaste because the first glitter and gaudiness of gold and colour were toned down, and mellowed without being faded or decayed. The chief rooms looked south and west upon the gardens, and beyond their walls, over a fair undulating park, through which ran a river, beloved of anglers, with many a curve and woody ilot in its course. The park was all open and carelessly ordered, but for that only the more attractive to devotees of the picturesque. Herds of cattle pastured there, and in this hot summer

weather, plunged into the water, and stood knee-deep, making perpetual repetitions of those homely pastoral vignettes which vagrant sketchers never tire of.

The purpose of some of the apartments had been changed to suit existing tastes and usages, but their characteristic features had suffered no alteration. The ball-room had become the drawing-room, richly draped with amber, but the fashion of it was all ancient, and the tiny leaded panes of the great windows were the glazing of Elizabeth's days. A hundred and ten feet long and eighteen wide this room was, lighted by a square bay at the upper end, glorious for the sunset through the yew-trees on the terrace, by a second square bay opposite the fireplace, and two charming semi-octagonal windows, one on either side of it. Over the fireplace was a family group by Kneller, and in every panel of the white walls a portrait of some knight or lady, hung there for its grace, beauty, and artistic merit. The grim old figures in armour, ruff and fardingale were exiled to the cold magnificence of the banquet-

hall, which was never used but for public occasions.

Basil Godfrey found himself extremely at his ease in the cool spaciousness of this great drawing-room when the day was too sultry for happiness out of doors. The ante-room to it was the small library which opened into a paved hall, and had a door and flight of steps descending to the upper terrace, made dusk and shady by a double row of yew-trees—very congenial to evening smoke and meditation. By this doorway, family-tradition said that the heiress of the Montacutes, who brought Whinmore to the Godfreys in Charles II.'s days, eloped with her lover, a captain in the King's Guard ; and it was called in memory thereof " Lady Cicely's Doorway " to the present time.

From the upper terrace another flight of steps, very broad and stately, led down into the flower-garden, perfectly square and formal, but radiant as all the colours and devices of Flora could make it. On the glowing and jewelled enclosure looked the three south windows of the drawing-room, an

exquisite recessed oriel in the dining-parlour, and the side lancets of the chapel which had an entrance from the garden by a narrow passage leading also to the humble cell called "The Priest's Room." It had been converted into a sort of museum of antiquities now.

The library was a long gallery at the head of the stairs, running from end to end of the eastern side of the inner quadrangle, and the principal bed-chambers branched off north and south from the same landing. The Lady Cicely's father, the last Earl Montacute, had kept his state at Whinmore with not less than five score servants, but there was no accommodation for such a host now, unless littered down in the stables. The small sleeping-closets that had contented past generations had been disgarnished, and in most cases made three into one, with dressing-room, bath-room, and boudoir attached. The house was, indeed, as perfect in its arrangements and as well-found in its appliances for comfort as modern ingenuity, bent on sacrificing none of the sacredness of antiquity, could make it.

And neither on house nor on land was there any burthen or mortgage. His income had always more than sufficed for Colonel Godfrey's wants, and the Whinmore farmsteads, cottages, and plantations were in as good condition as an honest, active agent, under a liberal master could keep them. Basil Godfrey, indeed, had before him the prospect of as desirable an inheritance as there was in the county, and the neighbours round about, both gentle and simple, talked more of his wonderful luck than of his cousins' loss.

And Basil Godfrey himself? He was quite alone that long week after the funeral while his uncle lay sick and secluded; and when a man is alone for a week in a strange house, he has abundant leisure to consider himself. And he did consider himself. Thus far, to express his dispositions briefly, he had hated bonds of every sort, and had loved change in all its varieties. There were moments during that week when Whinmore was as bad to him as any prison-house—when he felt it dreary, dull, dead-alive. And again there were moments when the latent spark

of ambition in him shot out a flame and showed him higher things to live for than vagaries, which this dreary, dull, dead-alive place would help him to reach up to. And there were moments more than any when he thought of sweet Joan Abbott, and remembered that love-letter he had sent her. Did he regret it? He was so far from regretting it that he beguiled many a half-hour of this memorable week by writing her a journal-letter which he despatched on the track of the other the day Colonel Godfrey came down stairs. It contained the history of his doings and devisings since he came to his new fortune, and was almost as confidential as a man's talking to himself. Here it is—the readiest continuation of his and Joan's love-tale.

XXVII.

BASIL GODFREY TO JOAN ABBOTT.

“ IF you were within reach, dear Joan, we would take counsel together. I have fifty thoughts that I should tell you if you were here for me to read their reflection in your sweet grave eyes. Whisper, do you love me? What have you done with the little letter that I wrote you from the cattle bridge? Will you keep it with the lilies?—it is the only one you will ever get from me, my own master as I was.

“ Have you heard yet of the great change that has befallen me? how fortune has robbed me of my independence, and given me instead the reversion of a load of her lumber? In plain language I am become heir to estates in Scotland, in Yorkshire, in Hampshire, all by the death of my

cousins, the two sons of Colonel Godfrey of Whinmore. They were drowned boating together on Loch Rannoch just a week ago, and we have buried them here to-day. They sleep with their fathers, and I am heir to their kingdom.

“There is another life beginning for me, and a much harder life. Let me talk to you of my old adventures and my new perplexities. I want a tender, indulgent friend, and I know you will be very indulgent and wisely tender if you love me, though ever so little. The birds of the air carry news of mischief—why cannot they carry you my complaints, and bring me back words of sweet comfort from you? I am not so happy to-night as I was when we clasped hands, and said good-by. The sunset glows blood-red through the branches of a patriarchal yew-tree in front of my window:—did you ever see the funereal blackness of yews against the sky ensanguined? It would be a crime past pardon to meddle with the Whinmore yews, but I could wish them away just now; they look so dismal, so haunted, as if they had witnessed generations of tragedies, and kept the remembrance

of them on their consciences. And they have. It is told of the Godfreys that since they have possessed Whinmore, the house has never descended from father to son. Colonel Godfrey succeeded to a cousin who came by a violent death, and I am fallen heir through two accidental deaths. It is our *luck*.

“ I never coveted lands and riches ; I was contented with what I had of good gifts, and desired no more, save only *you*. But the fortunes of the Godfreys have overtaken me, and 'tis of no use to hold back from their enjoyment for fear of what tradition says they will entail upon my children. The head of the house inherits the curse. It was not a curse causeless, and therefore it comes. Shall I tell you why ? I will tell you to-morrow ; it will be a plea for another talk with my love— Answer me a little word, dear Joan ; may I call you so—*my love* ? ”

. . . . “ Good-morning, sweetheart, and where are you in this midsummer splendour ? I wish that you were here—*here*, close by me, that my pen might lie still, and our two tongues prattle

instead. We would go out under the thick trees, and there I would tell you our legend. Sunbeams would pierce its gloom—would perhaps abolish it altogether, this serene, scented, sylvan weather.

“How long lasts a curse?—it must surely wear out sometime. I think it must be worn out now—that it will not come to us. My heart feels light again because of you, my love, my love! good enough, pure, holy, innocent enough to scare away the very shadow of evil, though you are but a little pagan, Joan;—did I not see you first making your votive offerings to the old divinities of heathendom? Well, I have a strain of paganism too—I believe that I was born fortunate. You see how bold and confident I am become, and all for a *dream* of you that I had last night. Some day I will tell it in your ear, but not now—beautiful dream that I shall hold for a prophecy.

“Where shall I begin with my story? ‘At the beginning,’ say you, methodical feminine soul! ‘At once upon a time.’ But ‘Once upon a time’ is the prelude for a long story, and mine is short—an affair of twenty lines.

“ Well ! once upon a time, in Queen Elizabeth’s latter days when the papists were being persecuted with sword and cord, a young Catholic gentleman, the last son of his house, was falsely and maliciously denounced to the government by a private enemy as one engaged in a plot for its subversion, and the bringing in again of the old religion. His denouncer was charged to arrest him ; and came by night to his mother’s house secretly, with a troop of men and a warrant to take him, dead or alive. The gentleman escaped by a concealed passage, while his mother, to give him time to get clear away, kept the door of his chamber against the searchers until they broke it in by force. The leader of them was Gervase Godfrey, his enemy and rival, a man as cruel as he was crafty, who, when he found his prey flown, revenged himself on the brave, frail mother, put fetters on her and thrust her into a strong-room, with two ruffians for guard, and then set forth with the rest of his troop in pursuit of the fugitive. They hunted him all that night, and the next day and the next night and the day after it, and he,

to baffle them, after a long course, doubled back home. But the bloodhounds were not baffled. They caught him on his own threshold, and when he lifted his arm to defend himself, one against a score, they struck him down and killed him. Then they fetched out his mother and asked her: 'See now whether this be thy son or no?' as he lay in his blood on the pavement. 'Saint and martyr,' said she, and dipt her finger in the ruddy life-stream and crossed herself. Then to Gervase Godfrey: 'You lied, man—no traitor nor conspirator was my son, but the lover best beloved of the lady ye both sought. You may win the lady and you may win her lands, but as the Lord hears my voice this day, because ye have made me childless, never son of yours, or any son of his father amongst the Godfreys, shall sit in his father's seat for ever! And though you add house to house and field to field, and strike root in other soil, the curse shall follow you; for an accursed man are you and a false apostate and cruel murderer of the innocent.'

"There is our family legend, Joan. Is it true,

or is it only well invented to explain our broken succession? I am resolved to consider it as well invented."

. . . . "Dear friend, dear Joan, I am out of love with my own company, and I have none other. My uncle is ill, and shut up in his room, and I, all day, have been alone. My sister sends me word that they have news of you amongst the old Rhine towns already—that you only rested a single night in Paris. I know exactly what you will do there, and what you will see, and how you will like it—the castles, and the dust, and the heat, and the tourists, and the beautiful hills, and the walnut-trees by the river; and I envy them all that you are there and not here. I should like to throw my knapsack over my shoulder, and to march away after you, light and free.

"There are no chains on my wrists, no fetters on my feet, but for the strength and weight of my invisible bonds I cannot stir. I ask—is this *me*? Me—familiar with hard walking, hard working, hard living,—lapped in silken luxury, fed like the birds, drowsy for indolence, dull for lack of

care. Proud fair ladies (but not one so lovely as my love!) and solemn gentlemen, in velvet coats and ruffles of lace, look down from the walls upon me, with serious contemplation wondering at me—I wondering again at them. A man must have served an apprenticeship to this life to enjoy or even to endure it. I foresee in its vacuity every imp of *ennui* that is permitted to torment the idle-great:—how shall I circumvent their malice?

“I wish that a grand spontaneous something to be achieved would shape itself out of the uncertainty of my future. If I were ambitious I should possess a certain fulness of life, but I have not discovered yet that I am ambitious. I would rather have one kind little word from your lips than the mouth-honour of all the men and women in the world! Dearest, give me that kind little word, and tell me what I must do. You are a hero-worshipper, like all your sex, but I fear, Joan, that there is not the stuff in me heroes are made off. And yet my soul will never rest satisfied with lotus-eating—which, in Whinmore

parlance and practice, signifies hunting, coursing, and shooting with neighbouring squires, and dining and dancing with their wives and daughters. I foresee what my fate will be if I do not defy it at once :— I shall decline into the popular hackabout heir, welcome at the meet, in the dining-room, and in the boudoirs of ladies, and at five and thirty I shall come to my senses in disgust, and find that I have thrown the best part of my life away, and that I cannot get it back again—no, not at any price.

“ I have had noble impulses, I have aspired at times, I have felt within me a rush of power, and energy of boundless work, but it has been always when my outward case was at the worst. If prosperity is to soften the metal of my character, I shall be bitterly sorry some day that hard necessity has not had the annealing of it ! It can never be more than a dream unrealized now, for of my inheritance I cannot divest myself, nor of its peculiar duties ; but it seems to me that if I had been left in my original groove, and if I could have had you, large-hearted, high-minded, to walk with me

along it, I might have climbed further, earned truer honour than ever I shall earn mounted on golden stilts, unless I may still have you to lean on, and keep me from stumbling—and I shall if true worship has its reward. I make you a reverence, my lady, my love—the best lady, the fairest love ever man had, I think.”

. . . . “To-day my uncle is recovering—tomorrow he will re-appear in his place, the poor old father that death has robbed of both his children! It is difficult to realize the sorrow and calamity of a man like him. He was less affected at their funeral than the servants. He seemed more amazed and bewildered at the loss of his heirs than desolate for the loss of his sons. Here, it will be thought, is my task and my duty—to be a child to the old age of him who has none. But what if he needs me as little for his daily life as he needed them? Or what if, on the contrary, he claims more than I can bear? I feel nothing so much at this moment as the drag that fortune has been pleased to hang at the heels of my independence. My luckless cousins were all sub-

mission to their father whom they hardly ever saw. I could be submissive on the same easy terms ; but I have a presentiment that he will make up for negligence to them by an over-conscientious regard for me—from which, my guardian angel keep me ! Nothing so burthensome, nothing so exacting as a retrospective, repentant, duty-doing affection. Ah, Joan, we are not so patient, devoted and good as you !”

. . . . “I have delighted myself these many days in talking to you, and in fancying that you would listen, and now a doubt begins to plague me lest I have been too sure of the fond interest that I have imagined. How can I solve this doubt? I cannot solve it. Dear love, do you, and send a little letter for certainty to him whose whole heart is yours.

“BASIL.”

XXVIII.

UNCLE AND NEPHEW.

BASIL'S letter to Joan went its way. It is true that he had delighted himself in his confidential outpouring. There was that in his love for her that made it easier to him and pleasanter to tell her his thoughts, his previsions, his anxieties, than it would have been to tell them to his sister or to any of his men friends—and he had some worthy of all confidence, able to advise in all circumstances :—and this because he was secure of her sympathy. If she was not worldly-wise, if she could not seriously counsel, she could be very tender, and she could admire. He was perfect in her imagination of sixteen. Now Nelly, faithful in her sisterly affection, was a little too quick-sighted to his weaknesses, his

facility, his fickleness; she almost discouraged his reformation by her doubts of its genuineness and permanence. His men friends all loved him—but when is a young fellow a hero to his equals? Joan alone believed in him, honestly, with a single eye and a single mind—believed in him with the steadfast assurance that is a man's best help often, and best comfort always, when the world is hard upon him. He was conscious of this contagious strength in her;—who that has been tried does not know by the experience, or the desolate want of it, the new force that can be drawn from loving faith? And writing to her intimately he grew more in love with her. She was out of sight, and her little rusticities of dress and manner that had perplexed him fell off from her picture in his memory. The divine sweetness of her countenance, the maidenly dignity of her air remained—his ideal of all that is good and gracious and lovely in woman.

Colonel Godfrey dined downstairs that day. He had been in his prime a very fine-looking man—was still a fine-looking man at sixty,

keeping his erect military carriage and firm tread unimpaired. There was enough likeness between himself and his nephew to mark them as of the same race, but with the external resemblance similarity ceased. The colonel invited his young kinsman to reveal himself. Basil was nothing loth. He was desirous of learning, soon and decisively, on what footing they were to stand. He talked of his brief university life, and of his life abroad, his many journeyings, and the bank whence he drew his funds—all with a clear respect for himself and his ways and means which the colonel felt tempted to sneer at. Basil perceived his inclination, but was purposely blind to it. He was resolved that his personal independence and dignity should not be trampled into mere negative qualities, but should be recognized and acknowledged by his uncle. After all, to be rich is an accident, and may befall fools—though it had befallen him, it made him none the better man.

“There is a strain of the democrat in you, Basil,” was the colonel’s first essay in personal criticism. “I am sorry for that, because the

Godfreys of Whinmore have always been on the Tory side. But you are not past hope of conversion ; you are young, and the change of air may soften the asperity of your principles."

Basil took the suggestion with good-humour ; he could do so because he had yet, in fact, *no* principles—only sentiments, tendencies, crotchets, private vagaries ; liberal certainly, but a long way from radical. "My political faith is yet to learn, sir," said he. "With the hereditary air I may probably imbibe the hereditary faith."

The colonel knitted his brows. It was he who had made the suggestion of change, but he did not relish his nephew's easy adoption of it. "A man who trades in politics should have political convictions," said he virtuously.

"True," rejoined Basil ; "but how many men who trade in politics have minds powerful enough to attain to them ? It is the tacit recognition of the general incapacity that creates party and elects the leaders."

The colonel privately thought that his nephew was a clever fellow. He had never been able to

feel proud of his own boys. They were good but slow, like their mother's people. There had been a chance of putting forward Reginald immediately after he came to his majority as candidate for the small borough of Standen, where the Whinmore influence was considerable, but the young man hung back. He had no ambition, no leaning to public life, and the project was dropt, much to his father's disappointment. Now it suddenly revived again in the colonel's mind. He had no taste for the toil, but he was not insensible to the honour that might accrue to his name from having his heir in Parliament.

"You must have a profession, Basil," resumed he after a pause. "Every man should have a profession."

"Mine has been enough for me, so far, sir," was the reply. "It is pleasant, and needs no capital but brains."

"The question is whether a good capital in brains might not yield you higher interest than on the newspaper press. If you take your due place here, your occupation's gone—no journal

keeps a country correspondent at Whinmore. There is a man at Standen already to quote the market prices of grain and stock." The colonel meant to be gently satirical. Evidently the fame of his nephew's pretty poems and prettier stories had not been heard in the elect circles where he was familiar. Basil had the wit not to feel affronted or undervalued.

"I am too old for the army or navy, and I have no passion for theology or law," said he. "The profession of journalist, or man of letters, suits me—has suited me, that is. Would you like me to go in for political life?"

"I should. It is the duty of the landed gentry to stand by the country, and serve it in the House of Commons. I had my training in another service, and was never fit for that one; but you—you have time and opportunities before you, and behind you experience of a useful practical sort. If my poor boy Reginald had lived, he must some day have represented the borough of Standen, or have suffered a stranger to usurp his rights. You, Basil, are heir to his privileges, and should take

up his duties as well. Whenever a dissolution of Parliament takes place, you ought to come forward as a candidate in the Conservative interest."

"It is the career that every English gentleman aspires to," began Basil, his pride and fire suddenly rising.

"Hear, hear," interjected the colonel, and both laughing, they felt nearer akin and more friendly than they had done yet. The formality and slight sense of antagonism that had been between them vanished, and confidence and a sense of cordial understanding came in their room.

The conversation that had been begun in the dining-parlour over wine and walnuts was carried on in the garden with cigars. Smoke is a valuable medium for business talk. Here Basil Godfrey heard what his uncle proposed to do for him in the way of money, of house and home; and to all his proposals, which were most generous, he found it much easier to consent than to object. The colonel did not intend to change his own mode of life.

"I am too old to take to other ways now," said

he. "Whinmore is dull to a man used to live in the world. You must brook its dulness of course, and make yourself known and popular at Standen and in the country. And you must study history, sir, and learn the elements of your new profession—and there will be a couple of hunters in the stable, and the shooting is good. And if you want more pastime, fall in love—but discreetly; if you are ambitious of a great career, you ought not to marry until you have the chance of a great alliance."

Basil puffed forth a cloud that hid his guilty countenance. He was not disposed to spoil his fortunes at the outstart by confessing to his modest passion, and his kinsman asked no confidences of that kind. He began instead to give him a general view of the squirearchy amongst whom, for the present, his life ought chiefly to be spent, and with whom it must be his policy to stand well.

"I made my home here during fourteen years," said the colonel, "but after my wife's death the place became distasteful to me. A man cannot force his likings, and it is allowed that Whinmore

does not afford much variety of amusement. Poor Maria liked the dignity of her position in the county and her occupation amongst the cottagers ; she was a good woman, and the people missed her. If Reginald had lived he would have been a philanthropic, stay-at-home squire, on his mother's system ; would have been put in the commission of the peace, would have hunted his three days a week in the season, and have tramped his six hours a day after the grouse in the wet ling. It used to be a consolation to me, in my own shortcomings, to feel that I had provided an heir who knew and would perform his duty. You will have to sustain some disadvantageous comparisons perhaps, but I hope you are able to bear them, and that you will set yourself to follow in his steps rather than in mine."

"Or I may take a new way to popularity, sir," said Basil. "I was never good at beaten roads."

"Ah, well, I impose no terms—we have always lived friendly with our people. They are an adhesive race here ; old families and long rooted in the land all of them, peasants and yeomen as long

as the lords and squires. There may be changes when the railway opens up the country, but at present we are safe."

Basil professed an opinion that some infusion of new blood and new money might enliven the society.

"I should fear rather that it might break up what little exists," replied the colonel. "Sir Ralph and Lady Hobbes would never tolerate a spic-and-span commercial neighbour, though he were rich as Croesus. He might as well go and settle at Timbuctoo with the hope of a welcome as come here. Sir Ralph was the last man in the Riding who wore breeches, and his wife was the last woman who put on a hoop. Sir Ralph has the hounds, and is a very good master. They are people of the highest authority here—my dear wife competed with Lady Hobbes, but not successfully; guests will go ten, twelve, fifteen miles to dine with them; they are proud, prejudiced, honourable, stupid old fogies, and young Sir Ralph is his father over again. Nevertheless, you must be friends. There was an idea of putting him

forward for Standen, but he is a born and bred sportsman, and nothing else—they might as well have sent one of his own pointers to the hustings. Then there are two daughters, pretty little waxy girls they were a year or two ago—that is Sir Ralph Hobbes' family; his place is Haukswell, three miles at the other side of Standen. And our parson here is Sir Ralph's brother. If your father had outlived the rector who was at Whinmore when I came into the property, he would have had the church of course, but he died first. So it made things pleasant to put in the kinsman of a good neighbour. You will like him; he is a sensible fellow, and knows the world, and his wife is a lady, and so are the girls, but not beauties. There is no peril for you there—unless you are susceptible to the charms of intellect unadorned."

Basil blushed twice behind his cigar during the colonel's speech; the first time at the mention of the little waxy daughters at Haukswell, and now again at the mention of the clerical blues; but he had self-possession enough to declare himself *not* susceptible to the charms of intellect unadorned,

and the colonel was not a person very closely observant of changes of countenance. If Joan Abbott had been a lady of high degree, forthwith her lover's preference would have been avowed, and he would have made his freedom here a condition of amenability elsewhere. But he knew, no man better, how foolish and extravagant his passion would appear to Colonel Godfrey, and he held his peace on that matter, tacitly allowing him to believe that his heart was as unfettered as his political faith. The colonel did put that construction on his young heir's silence, and was perfectly contented in it. Basil would have much finer opportunities of choosing a wife fit to preside at Whinmore, now that Whinmore was as good as his own, than he could possibly have had before, his kinsman thought, and presently said. Basil was not eager to continue the subject. He had a right to keep his secret if he pleased, but at the same time he felt that it would have been more generous to deal as openly with his uncle as his uncle was dealing with him. He did not do so, however, and he was not without pleas in extenua-

tion of what, in some lights, looked not unlike a deception.

Colonel Godfrey proceeded with his history of his neighbours. "That castellated mansion of which you catch a glimpse between the hills is Castle Harbinger, twenty-three miles off. The earl's name is national property,—you do not need telling anything of him. The countess is a delightful old lady, and all the sons and daughters are worthy of her. The girls are married; but Lord Crosfel, the eldest son, has a golden-haired darling growing up as lovely as any of them. *There* will be a prize for somebody six or eight years hence."

Again Basil blushed and puffed another obscuring cloud; for with this last insinulative suggestion the colonel turned to look in his nephew's face. He was baffled of any responsive glance, and then an idea occurred to him that perhaps the young man might have his reasons for putting aside and evading such allusions. He was piqued for a moment by this reserve, but only for a moment. After all, he had not yet established

a claim to Basil's confidence : only time and use could do that ; and meanwhile he could not thrust himself into it—that delicacy forbade.

Basil became aware of the check his uncle's spontaneousness had received by an abrupt diversion he made into electioneering business. The colonel gave him the whole story of the last election at Standen, when old Sir Job Clitheroe withdrew from its representation, and a man came from Birmingham to contest the seat with his son.

“A fellow from Birmingham, who began life as a nailer,” cried the gentleman, with wondering contempt ; “a fellow who had no more connection with Standen than with the moon. He was a radical out and out, and had a fine gift of the gab, with impudence to match. Tom Clitheroe is but ‘half-baked,’ as they say here ; and if Reginald or Ralph Hobbes would have stood, the Birmingham man would not have been tempted to come. But against Clitheroe he believed he had a chance, and he tried it ; and though he was out in his reckoning (Standen stuck to the

old stock), I am not sure that he would be again ; for Clitheroe has never opened his mouth in the House without proving himself a fool, and the hard-headed electors are ashamed of their representative. We shall perhaps have a fight to bring you in when the time comes, but we'll do it whatever it costs. I do not understand what business the cotton men and iron men and railway contractors have to come meddling in provincial boroughs where their names were never heard of. But they can spend money, and debauch the consciences of the electors with bribes, and so they get in."

"But who stood sponsor for the Birmingham man? somebody must have proposed him," said Basil.

"A busy attorney did it, Jabez Hughes by name, who fancied he could lead the people by the nose. They spent money enough to make Standen thirst for a repetition of the election sports, and Sir Job had to unloose his purse-strings too. I wish I had the devising of a new law against bribery and corruption. Every man

who dirtied his fingers by taking a bribe should be disfranchised for life; and every candidate who offered a bribe should have his name recorded on a register amongst fraudulent bankrupts, cashiered soldiers, and other rogues and vagabonds who are held unworthy of serving their country in any public trust. To attach to bribery a taint of personal dishonour would soon put a stop to it."

"Not a doubt of it. But if Birmingham men fight with money it is hard to beat them with love."

"You are right; there was never so much virtue talked of and so little practised. This is an age of stucco and electroplate. Men do mean things and avow mean motives that their fathers would have cried shame on. It is a marvel to me how well the House of Commons works when I hear what men are in it, and why they go there—some of them with never an idea of public duty, but only one of personal advancement and business credit. M.P. to their names is a handsome advertisement. But the best brains of the country are there too, and the blood of the whole is pure

enough to throw out evil humours. Do you read the penny papers?"

"Yes, and write in one of them, sir," replied Basil, laughing.

"Then I hope you practise their morality in the medium, and don't go to either extreme—that makes it vice. Do not tell me that you are on the staff of *The Morning Dram*!"

"I am not, sir. I am, or was rather, on the staff of *The Daily Flash*."

"Ah, indeed. *The Flash* is more rabid, but perhaps not so low as *The Dram*. You will be called some very pretty names by both if you come out as a Conservative member,—turn-coat, apostate, and what not."

"I shall be able to bear abuse, sir. I have never meddled with domestic politics, or committed myself to any line. My contributions were mainly traveller's notes and observations, of the same type as those in *The Constitutional Gazette*. I shall go into the study of great questions with a mind perfectly free; but my natural tendencies are towards progress and reform."

“ You must enter the House then as an independent member without ties of party, and the more personal character you have the better you will fill that place. Be honest and steady to your opinions whatever they are ; honour, and office, if you aspire to it, will follow in due course.”

Basil Godfrey felt quite happy and elated after this conversation. He had a career before him, a life worth living. He *was* ambitious—that he discerned beyond mistake in the hour when he discerned that there were prizes of renown which he might run for with reasonable hopes of success. The colonel went indoors, and left him still pacing the garden. It was a glowing soft evening : the sky full of warm reds and purples and suffused greys, into which the landscape on the horizon melted imperceptibly. He remembered it always in its pure serenity as the epoch in his life when he first looked steadfastly into the great arena where great prizes are striven for, and before he knew anything of the heat and anger and sacrifices of that battle. For some time he indulged in dreams of the conflict and the victory, and then he

turned for sweet rest to thoughts of his love. Joan was rest to him—rest and peace of heart; no Lily, no May-day caprice, but the helpmate elect of his soul, from whom first he had drawn the inspiration and the desire to be worthier and nobler than he was.

And now his first impulse was to out-pour to her again the flood of new feelings that were bubbling up from the fount of his new ambition. He was not reticent by nature, but expansive, and he liked to have the interest and approbation of those dear to him and to whom he was dear. He had not patience to wait for any response to his letters, and that very night he began another. His sister, who received from him comparatively meagre epistles, suspected how he was favouring Joan.

“He has initiated a correspondence with Joan Abbott, mark my words, Edward, if he has not,” said that sagacious lady to her husband after the perusal of a document containing only an outline of events at Whinmore. “Basil must talk of himself to somebody, and in his sudden flush of

fortune he will be fuller of romantic crotchets than ever. I should not be sorry, and I should not be surprised to hear that he had rushed abroad after her, and proposed a formal engagement and an early marriage, if I could be sure that he is bound in honour to her."

"But I should be much surprised, and he ought not to be held bound in honour to her for anything that passed here," replied the rector. "It was the mutual attraction of two young and beautiful persons, but every reason there was for discouraging it then is doubled now. They may fill each other's imagination and heart for a few months, and be none the worse for it, but I do not believe they will ever marry, Nelly—looking at the whole affair as a man of the world, and not as a philosopher or a poet. Basil is wilful but not blind. I wish he would go to Oxford again, and work for his degree. It would discipline him for public life."

"It is a difficult case: I should like to know what he is thinking about," mused Nelly.

"If you are wise you will restrain your curiosity."

Let them have their love to themselves. The less it is meddled with and published now, the less pain will come of it hereafter when it declines to its natural end. You do not believe that it will decline? Well, still let it alone. Joan has good protectors, and may be left to them with perfect confidence."

"For all that, I wish I could see what thoughts and projects are working in Basil's mind. From this dull letter of facts" (indicating the epistle the morning's post had brought) "I am sure he is making her the depositary of confidences that used to be reserved for me. I am not jealous, Edward; pray, do not imagine that I am jealous! I am only anxious lest he should not confirm her right to them, once given. I shall never acquit him if he makes her unhappy."

The rector did not care to continue the argument, and the subject was allowed to drop. It had never occurred to his admirable wife that perhaps Joan Abbott would not willingly forego the joy of her first love, even if warned by a voice from heaven that length of days was scarcely possible to it.

XXIX.

JOAN ABBOTT TO BASIL GODFREY.

“ A LETTER for you, Joan,” said Mrs. Paget, and handed her one of several that she had just brought in from the *Poste Restante* at St. Goar, where they had arrived that afternoon.

It was Basil Godfrey's second letter. Her godmother regarded Joan's blushing glad face with extreme seriousness. The blind curate, who was sitting out in the balcony of their private room at the hotel, turned his head as if waiting to hear what next. But nothing followed. Joan took her letter with trembling eager fingers silently, and his mother went out on the balcony with his and hers to read them to him aloud.

It was early evening, bright after a summer

storm of rain and thunder, which had cleared off all the day's dust and sultriness. The French windows were both open, an English tea was on the table, and books and work had been brought out; for here the travellers proposed to rest a week. It was Joan's mission to impart an air of home comfort and taste to their temporary halting-places, and she put the finishing touches to her pretty task with some wild ivy and flowers before she took a second look at her letter. Then she just broke the seal, noted the triple postage on the cover, and the three closely-written pages it enclosed; but the rest of her pleasure she deferred until she could be alone.

Joan had been appointed tea-maker and general helper and good providence to Mrs. Paget and her blind son, and already they would have felt half lost without her brave cheerfulness and invincible good-humour. Everything was delightful to her, everything was charming abroad; and she had come out amazingly, as a plant does when set in the full air and sunshine after being long immured in the half light of a north room. On

the road, on the river, many a jaded, world-worn man turned to look again at her happy and joyous face as at a sight that did him good. Her beauty and winning grace of manner always brought prompt strong arms of strangers to the aid of her helpless protectors, and her simple cordial thanks were a guerdon they would have earned at a much harder price. She thought and said, what numbers of kind and courteous people were to be met in the world; and Mr. Paget, agreeing with her, added that he found it much easier and pleasanter to move about than he had expected. He enjoyed a talk with casual acquaintance, and had no fear of being intruded upon by any that were undesirable; for his true ear never failed in distinguishing who was the gentleman and gentlewoman that might safely be introduced to his mother. In this manner they had made some friends whom they would be glad to meet again, and had much enhanced the agreeableness of their travels. But it was certain that they carried their best sunshine with them in the person of sweet Joan Abbott, and it was fully understood now that

she was not to part from them so long as they remained abroad.

A great anxiety about her had, however, taken hold on her godmother's mind. Joan had not said a word of her first letter from Basil Godfrey ; she had offered no confidence and had asked no counsel, but neither had she answered it—of that the old lady was quite sure. And now here was a second letter, by its size and substance, one of length ; and from Mrs. Franklyn had come another to herself containing chief amongst its news that of her brother's sudden accession to fortune. The blind curate listened intently to the reading of it, but made no remark, and when his mother had come to the end of the last page, she gently pressed his hand, whispering : “ Mr. Godfrey has written to Joan—let us wait and see what she will tell us. She has not looked at her letter yet.”

Then they went in to tea, and talked of things indifferent, as people do every day of their lives with hearts and minds full of other thoughts and interests. Joan's were the most disengaged.

She had her joy and no foresight yet. When the meal was over Mr. Paget retreated again to the balcony, and with a cigar for company, listened to the music of the band playing in the hotel gardens. His mother opened a newspaper from England, and set herself to study its columns, whereupon Joan, without making any plea, escaped to the bedroom which she was to share with her godmother, and gave herself up to the delight of her letter. The old lady left her time and opportunity enough to peruse it twice, and then she went to her, strung-up for an explanation. But already Joan had resolved what she would do, and without waiting to be inquired of, she immediately said: "Mr. Godfrey has written me a long letter:—I cannot show you that, god-mamma, because it was meant only for me, but I will show you my answer when it is written."

"Is it necessary to write, Joan?" asked the old lady, tenderly taking her hand.

"I think it is. Yes, I must write;" and Joan, as she spoke, gazed afar off at the hills with eyes

in which a sort of wondering melancholy had for the moment eclipsed the sunshine.

“ Well, my love, I am glad that you have told me. I shall not allow myself to be troubled with doubts and fears now I know that you will give me your confidence,” said Mrs. Paget, and kissed her, and went away. She had been young and enthusiastic once herself, and knew how absorbing are the first letters of a lover.

Joan took several days to write her letter, or rather she allowed several to elapse while she meditated it. The actual writing was no easy task. She had not dreamed herself into familiarity with Basil as he had done with her. Her imagination was shy of his magnificent idea, and there was no sense of nearness to him in her diffident worship. Her mood underwent more changes than a variable April day during this period of reflection, but its prevailing tone was one of tender reserve. “ He is too far off—too high above me,” she said, but even while she said it, she felt herself drawn heart and soul towards him. Then the roses flushed warm in her face

as she thought that it might really be given her to love him. Did he not ask it, entreat it, not once only but again and again? What beautiful wooing words were these :—"Dearest, do not deny me the belief that you love me a little who love you so much—Whisper, Joan, do you love me?" "Oh, yes, I love you!" answered her fond heart, and glowed responsive to every ardent phrase.

At last she began her difficult task. She might not, she dared not confess herself freely as he did, or she need not have been so long.

"I have kept the letter you wrote to me on the cattle-bridge. The first time I saw you there you came out of the twilight unheard behind me, and then you vanished into the twilight again going up the hill, but my face was towards you, and shall be ever, and I will pray God for you in your great fortunes as long as I live.

"To answer all you say I have not fit words. You are of gentle blood and I am peasant-born, and my soul cleaves to my own people. You are ambitious too, and I know a little from books what ambition is and what men are. You will

go into a world where I cannot follow you, and will be soon out of reach of my simple love. Yet call me what you like to-day—sweetheart or friend—and your friend I will be always, though I may never be ‘your lady, your love.’ For look what a distance there is between us. But the other day I dropt you my curtsey—as a cottager to a gentleman—and though they tell me I am bred a gentlewoman, I know we do not stand on even ground, nor ever shall. If women are all hero-worshippers, be you my hero; and I warn you it is not success, nor fame, nor power that will rouse my enthusiasm,—it is that a man should be good and true and pure in his life, and in his public acts without a desire but for the common weal. God has given you noble gifts and fortune has set you above ignoble temptations; you are one in ten thousand for luck, and opportunities of honourable service will not fail you by-and-by. You will have a career—a great career, I fully, firmly believe;—whether you will be the happier I cannot predict, but my hero will look to his work and not to its rewards.

“Need I tell you that I am happy both within and without. The weather is glorious, the scenery delicious, and the fatigues of travel are none to me. Our plan is to go down the Rhine as far as Cologne, and then to return to Frankfort, always taking our leisure. My godmother and Mr. Paget are very good to me; it is holidays now, but as soon as we are settled at Frankfort, I am to go to lessons again; and my godmother says you are not to put any nonsense into my head, sir, to put them out. You were never a girl of sixteen, or you would know that I feel inclined at this moment to laugh and sing and dance and make fun of your seriousnesses, and my gravities written above:—that is my kind of caprice. I tell you that you may not think me wiser and better than I am. But you are to believe me always your faithful friend,

“JOAN ABBOTT.”

Mrs. Paget wrinkled her brows over some passages in this letter, but she did not condemn them; she only determined not to inspect any more. The intimacy between the two young

people had evidently gone so far that it must be allowed to take its course. And the course it took was that when Basil Godfrey received Joan's letter at Whinmore, he destroyed that other of his own which he had begun to write, and the same evening, while seated with Colonel Godfrey over their wine after dinner, told him he should like to take a little run abroad before the moor-shooting began. His indulgent kinsman bade him take a run by all means—a run of three weeks or a month if he chose.

“Then you will be ready to come back for the grouse and partridge,” added he; “and if you can endure the tedium of the place longer, you would do well to spend part of the hunting season here—the sport is good, and it will bring you acquainted with the people. I should like to keep Christmas at Whinmore myself, but the cold is too severe. I shall go to the south of France, probably to Mentone: and I have been telling Gibbs this morning that we will retrace our road to Baden next week—I was on my way when my poor boy's disaster brought me back. If you are not in

haste, we can travel to Paris together. I suppose you do not put on your knapsack and take to your legs until you get beyond Paris?"

"Yes, I always put it on for a start; I never move *en grand seigneur* at all," said Basil. "I think I won't begin yet, if you will excuse me. I want to take the Belgian and Saxon Switzerland route to the Rhine. I have traversed it once, but it was in abominable weather."

"Just as you please—perhaps you will come on to Baden; if you do, you will find me there," replied the colonel, and made no sign that he felt his nephew rather ungracious. He had heard that the young generation were selfish, and he began to think it true. He liked Basil, and would have enjoyed his society much had it been vouchsafed to him. But Basil had other pleasure in pursuit, very different from that of the invalidish elderly gentleman, and was too absorbed in thoughts of it to heed or obviate his mild disappointment.

XXX.

A MIDSUMMER MORNING.

THE travellers exceeded their week at St. Goar, awaiting some letter of moment to Mr. Paget, and it was not until about ten days after their arrival that it came. Joan Abbott then received a gentle hint from her godmother that she wished to be left in private with her son to consult about it, and set off herself up the Rheinfels in search of fresh green spoils to renew the decorations of their apartment. As she had no ulterior object in view, the first promising bit of broken ground she came upon she began to explore. This was behind the castle, rising in cliffs and knolls to the top of the hill that backed the town. Over the cliffs grew the profuse ivy: here, closely knit tapestry rooted by a thousand fibres to the rocks ;

there, waving in drapery and garlands delicately twisted and twined and veined. In moist shaded chinks and hollows sprang pale tufts of *fragilis*, and tassels of glossy hart's tongue hung from the undercliffs, while the commoner ferns spread their broad fronds everywhere.

Joan had filled her basket, and was cautiously descending a rough and steep foot-path, when she espied somebody below who had evidently just made discovery of her also. It was Basil Godfrey, and perceiving her sudden halt of recognition, he sprang with alacrity up the romantic rocks to meet her. She blushed for joy like the rosiest morning, and her blush was reflected on his eager ingenuous countenance. The encounter was, perhaps, a not altogether unanticipated delight—such pleasant possibilities enter into the day-dreams of young love. “Let me carry the basket,” said Basil, and Joan sweetly gave it up. “I could not keep away—you knew I should come?” he added, regarding her with lover's wistfulness. “Oh, yes, I knew—I hoped you would,” was her reply, and his triumphant rejoinder filled her with delight.

Nothing was changed of the morning, but for Joan it had received a new glory, and for Basil, too, who saw its beauty in her softly shining eyes. Years after she remembered every little detail of their meeting and their walk that day in company, as women remember only the crisis in their lives. Not that she appeared or felt minutely observant then—she was, indeed, rather absorbed and exalted; but incidents and impressions stamped themselves on her mind unconsciously, and whenever light was flashed on the faded things of her youth in later times, these started out in vivid natural colours, untarnished, immortal.

Basil and she seemed equal here. He wore his dusty travelling suit, Joan some fresh light raiment that was simple, graceful, and becoming for a lady—and a lady she looked now from the crown of her head to the sole of her foot. He was pleased, he was charmed, his eye, his taste were satisfied. Peasant-born she might be, but as she stood there with a welcome to him brightening all her countenance, he thought her surely the loveliest, dearest, sweetest perfection of

maidenhood. Both were by disposition happy, sanguine, ardent to enjoy, not prone to fear. They lived in the present; neither had any serious past to throw shadows on it; the future was their own to conquer—and they were in love!

They turned their faces from the town, from the castle to the green country. Wild-roses were out in profusion, and myriads of blooms whose scent was exquisite wafted to and fro in the air. They came to a cart-road which plunged deep into a wood, and followed it, and lost it in a wilderness of foot-tracks and a quarry.

And Basil talked—told Joan the new tale of his budding aspirations, and she listened, in Paradise. She could not express her full and tender sympathy, but no matter! he read it in her face. There glowed the soul of a brave unselfish woman, at all points worthy to mate with a hero. His pride would be to lay his laurels at her feet; already he was famous, deserving the reward of her love. The wings of youthful imagination achieve great heights on a sudden—pity is it

that climbing experience should labour and lag so painfully long and far below !

“ Why should a man do nothing in the world because he is heir to a rich inheritance ? ” said he. “ If I had to choose now between the career of labour that I meditate and the broad acres of Whinmore, I would choose the work. I will never sell my birthright of independence for a mess of pottage. I shall take Parson Franklyn’s advice, put on student’s harness at Oxford again, and read for a degree. If I have luck I shall come out a double-first, and when a dissolution of Parliament takes place, I shall be brought forward as a candidate for the borough of Standen, where we have some interest. The House of Commons governs the country, and there I mean to strike for honour and glory. Ah ! Joan, if we both live, you shall some day feel proud of me ! ”

“ I am proud of you now ! ” said she, and her whole heart went out towards his nobleness. The tears rose to her eyes, and as Basil charmed them away, she whispered, “ There is always a sob in my throat and a mist in my eyes when I am the happiest.”

They had taken an ascending path, and all at once they emerged from the heavy moist green shadow of thick trees upon the ridge of the hill, into the broad sunshine and sweet blowing air. Wide expanses of mountain and valley stretched miles and miles away to the dim horizon, now traced by a white road, now sunk into a dimple where lay a farmstead or a cluster of cottages. Here a bush of thornless roses tossed abroad its delicate perfume, and before they went further Basil plucked a handful of the dainty buds and white star-centred flowers to add to the treasures of Joan's basket.

"I saw speedwell in the grass below, if we come on any more, let us gather some—blue flowers are so pretty," said she. "Oh, here is a wee bit of forget-me-not—just two sprays," and she stooped to pick them.

"Let us share them," suggested Basil, and took one spray and put it between the leaves of his pocket-book.

The precious little flowers! They came on no more that day, but by-and-by they reached a

beautiful spot covered with short turf and thyme, most inviting for a rest; and there grew the bonny speedwell in patches of blue, deep and full as the mid-day sky. They sat down on the grass, and Joan, with her fresh face turned to the fresh wind, began to pluck the flowers, and to tie them together in posies with dried reeds that would break and defeat her purpose, while Basil lay at his length half a pace off, looking at her, and thinking how pretty bright rufflesome hair was blown about, and what patient, deft fingers she had.

They had fallen quite silent, and Joan, who had tired of her task, was gazing down on the shining course of the river through the trees, her hands folded in her lap, her fancy far astray, when suddenly a child's shadow passed between them, and a child's voice cried exultant: "Here they are, papa! I have found them!"

"Who's this little Golden-hair swooping down like a lark from the sky?" cried Basil, and raising himself on his elbow, he caught fast hold of the intruder, a fairy-like blossom of nine or ten years old.

The child instantly perceived that she had made a mistake, and had fallen amongst strangers instead of friends. She struggled to escape, her hat fell off, and down tumbled a shining flood of silken locks that had been tucked up in a net. Not being able to get free, she promptly changed her tactics, snatched off her assailant's wideawake, and flung it with all her little might into the bushes:—fortunately it stuck on a branch within reach of a long arm and a stick.

Joan did not know the small impetuous stranger, but she knew by sight one of the elder persons to whom her discovery had been announced. It was Mr. Baines, the artist who had stayed at "The Peacock" during the Ashleigh Well-Dressing, and who had painted the portrait of Emmot Torre. The gentleman with him was tall and dark, and of distinguished appearance,—evidently English also. The pair had paused a short distance off, as if studying and admiring the group. That was, indeed, their occupation.

"Stop!" the artist had said, arresting his companion's advance. "What a picture! It is not

often one surprises anything so idyllic, so perfectly charming ! ”

Basil did not see the two gentlemen, for his back was towards them, but they perceived that Joan saw them. Her cheeks were carnation, and his healthy brown face had caught her colour like a fresh tint of the sun. That, however, was from the warmth of the day, and from his exertions in holding his minute antagonist, who, having released one paw, was battering his fair curly head with it vigorously. “ Let me go, I don’t know you ! let me go ! ” gasped she, and at each sentence, down came her soft round fist with the heartiest good-will.

Joan could not help laughing, though with a shy confusion in her face. Mr. Baines thought this scene of “ Lovers Surprised ” would make a charming companion picture to his “ Well-Dressers.” He recognized both Basil and Joan, and marvelled as he drew near to find who were his lovers. Perhaps everybody felt slightly conscious except Golden-hair. Basil most assuredly did when he sprang up and faced the new-comers, and found that one was Lord Crosfel, his neighbour at

Whinmore, and the other a popular London artist. Lord Crosfel he had met but once for a moment ; Mr. Baines he knew well, and they shook hands with the extra cordiality of acquaintances meeting unexpectedly a long way from home. Then Lord Crosfel explained that the lively little girl was his daughter, and apologized for her mistake, at the same instant raising his hat to Joan.

“ It was your dress, which is like her mother’s,” said he, “ and your face was hidden.”

Joan smiled and blushed bewitchingly, and the child, who had hardly desisted from her half-angry struggle with Basil, when she heard that he was known to her father, said she would “ Give in,” “ giving in ” meaning in this instance pouting a rosebud mouth to be kissed as a preliminary to being let go. But Basil had lost much of his self-possession, and unless she had intimated peremptorily that *she* desired the kiss, he would have suffered the opportunity to slip unimproved.

“ You are Master Head-in-air ! ” cried she, with ready child’s wit applying to him a character in one of her last birthday gift-books.

Her father laughed indulgently : “ Master Head-in-air ! ” echoed he ; “ very good, mouse, very good ! ”

Basil did not appear to feel that it was so very good. He menaced her in response to her provocation, and when she prepared to run enticingly, made a feigned dart after her, but stopt and borrowed Mr. Baines' stick to recapture his wide-awake. Then Golden-hair grew sage, and solicited Joan's aid in restoring her flowing locks to their net, and finally danced and pranced off again, still in search of those friends for whom she had mistaken our lovers. The gentlemen immediately followed her, bowing to Joan with solemn courtesy, and making no single remark to each other on the encounter, but continuing their discourse on the restoration of old pictures which it had interrupted. But Lord Crosfel speculated whether the young heir of Whinmore was engaged to be married to that bright and beautiful lady ; and the artist, interpreting their story into a romantic idyl more pretty than likely to be permanent, wondered whether he could get a commission from the

lover to paint his lady-love's portrait as she sat with her hat off, and her wind-ruffled hair in the wood.

Basil and Joan were not sorry to be quit of the intruders. "I think," said he, "there is no place so secluded but the world finds it out." And then he told her who and what they were, which led to some general talk about people and things, ways and customs, prejudices and partialities; and on a thousand matters they found themselves agreed. Both were still at the best of what God had made them—truthful and trustful, with good instincts and great courage. Basil had some experience of life, but by no means so much as he imagined, and yet he knew the world far better than he knew himself. He had an idea that it was easier than it is to walk straight, and do the right, and give temptation the go-by. True, his temptations had not yet been violent. He had never come to any point where two ways meet of which he must for ever choose the one and leave the other. In the calm solitude of nature he honestly believed that he had taken at the flood that tide in his affairs

which, with Joan for his consort, must lead on to happy, honourable fortune. He might have to reconsider his tack, might drift away from his consort in the conflicting currents and troublesome eddies of a conventional world, and then his course might seem less direct, less clear than it did now, viewed from afar in sylvan shades and on the mountain tops; but of such possibilities he had no forecast yet to vex his soul.

And as for Joan she seemed to have come to an exquisite pause and resting-place in life. Her present joy was without a flaw. Basil had soon dissipated her scruples in telling her his tale of love. He was enthusiastic, ardent, high-spirited; he insisted on a truce to all perplexing previsions. What was the dull, selfish, meddlesome, garrulous world to them? Their world was within themselves! There was no personal inequality between them, and conventional inequalities he refused to acknowledge; he felt above them, he despised them. She was beautiful, generous, warm-hearted, well-nurtured, a capital little scholar; she was his darling, his delight, his only love, and she loved

him! Was not that enough? What could a princess do more? He would have no princess, no love but her!

So they beheld their future, a cloudless Eden, with a wilderness of castles in its blue serenity, and forgot time in that infinite calm and splendour, until Joan came back with a start and a terror to the present world. What would her godmother, what would Mr. Paget think of her long absence? Basil told her they knew he was come; he had seen them, and spoken to them—they would understand her absence. Nevertheless she would not let him delay her longer, and they went back to the town and the hotel together, and were watched coming up the steps by more pairs of kind eyes than one, and were guessed by sympathetic souls to be what they were—plighted lovers, and very fond.

XXXI.

THE PORTRAIT-PICTURE.

BASIL GODFREY was from this day forth welcomed and spoken of by Mr. and Mrs. Paget as Joan Abbott's betrothed, and letters from her god-mother to Mrs. Franklyn and to Joan's father carried the news to Ashford. Basil wrote to both also, and Joan wrote to her mother with a joint petition from him and herself that the engagement might be kept a family secret. It was so kept, and was never so much as named even between the parson's wife and the schoolmaster's wife. They were, when it came to a positive announcement, more surprised almost than they had a right to be, and neither felt or professed to be glad. As for the rector, he had as little faith as before in its ever coming to a marriage.

“Now that Basil has made himself sure of Joan’s affection, he will have leisure to take other things into account,” said he. “For both their sakes we will not talk of the affair, Nelly.” And they did not talk of it.

“There’s many a slip ’twixt the cup and the lip, Reuben,” was Mistress Abbott’s conclusion on the whole matter. They’re abroad, an’ out o’ sight, so we’ll say nought to your folks or mine. ’Appen when Joan comes home, she may ha’ forgotten him and he her.”

“I doubt Joan’s easy forgetting, but it’s a business to keep close counsel on,” was the schoolmaster’s reply, and that night, to and fro in his garden, he smoked the pipe of profound disquiet. He dearly loved his daughter—would have gone through fire and water to spare her pain. “But it is too late, too late to help it, and who could foreknow it?” was the burthen of his heavy and perplexed thoughts. And the fruit of them on the morrow was a letter to Joan full of kind paternal advice and warning—but equally useless whether it was meant for prevention or

cure. Joan only smiled superior over its copy-book moralities—the dear father did not understand.

Our lovers did not see Lord Crossfel or his bright little caprice of a girl again, but Mr. Baines was staying at the same hotel as themselves, and Basil Godfrey was glad of his company when he could not have that which he preferred to all other in the world. Joan saw them walking together by the river before breakfast, the morning after their encounter in the wood, and when Basil came in by-and-by to pay his compliments, he said he had a great favour to ask of her. She bade him ask on. “I want you to let Baines paint your portrait for me. He has a charming idea for a picture, which our surprisal yesterday suggested to him.”

Joan consented: “And will he paint us together—will it be a portrait-picture?” she inquired. Basil said that was the artist’s design, and the background was to be the very scene itself.

Mrs. Paget and her son had to be entreated too, and as they proved propitious the work was taken

in hand without an hour's delay. Mr. Baines secured a little cabinet on the top-story at the rear of the hotel, which had an admirable north light, and there he sketched in his picture before noon. This business kept the travellers at St. Goar another week, and a blessed, beautiful, ever-memorable week it was. Mr. Baines would have sittings from his models in the wood, to get the open-air glow, and there were sittings in the cabinet as well. Basil and Joan were all day together, here or there or in Mrs. Paget's parlour, and they were never so happy as together. It was an interlude from the pastoral age. The artist put all his soul and strength into the work, and they came out on the canvas two sweetly noble, happy faces—a pair that the world might look at in some gallery a century hence, not knowing who they were, and tell they were real lovers.

The picture had been left on the easel one day, the background and draperies only sketched in, but the heads finished, when they stood looking at it together and alone.

“I did not know I was so beautiful—I am so

glad !” said Joan. “ And you ! How strange it will be to see ourselves thus when we are grown old !”

Basil was given to quoting poetry in these halcyon days. He fell into the temptation now, and said, “ ‘ They could not be Meant to grow old, but die in happy spring, Before one charm or hope had taken wing.’ ”

Joan refused to be sentimental ; she laughed joyously—*she* had no thought of dying with the glorious sun rising towards noon. She felt much more like living for ever.

Basil regarded her with enthusiasm. The picture was beautiful, but she was ten thousand times lovelier ! “ I intended to introduce you to my generous kinsman first in effigy, but he shall see the dear original, and fall into captivity to that. Ah, Joan ! why are not all women bright and good and fair as you ? ”

“ Because we should tire with our monotony,” rejoined she. “ You would turn from a surfeit of sweetness.”

“ Do you menace me with a vein of bitter in reserve ? I don’t believe in it.”

No. He believed in her love, her perfect loyalty and maidenliness, but he did not realize her strength, firmness, clearness of soul, though indeed they were elements of her attractiveness. That knowledge would have to grow out of pain, as his present repose grew out of joy.

“I am not to be all learnt in one lesson,” was her mocking response. “Nor are you, sir. I do not know myself yet, but I shall be hardly a woman if I have not some bitter and salt and sour too in my blood as well as sweet.”

The day after this colloquy, Mr. Paget demanded a move on with his company, and Basil Godfrey not being objected to, chose to follow their lead to Remagen, to Coblenz, to Bonn, to Cologne, and back again to St. Goar, all in one week. Mr. Baines had stayed behind to finish the background of the picture on the spot; it was now completed, and fixed in an appropriate frame and case to preserve it from injury. All pronounced it a gem of art, and as a portrait-picture highly satisfactory; and when Basil had convoyed Joan and her friends to Frankfort and seen them comfortably housed there,

he recurred to his first idea of introducing her to Colonel Godfrey by this means, and set off to Baden, carrying the precious painting with him.

His kinsman gave him a cordial welcome, but was not long in discerning that the young man had some serious pre-occupation of his own which made him less agreeable society than he had been at Whinmore. Nor was Basil long in revealing himself and his business. He was impatient to have the affair over, and he brought forth the picture on the very evening of his arrival. The colonel comprehended the case at once: "Ah," said he, "*lovers!*"

"And portraits," added Basil. His success with Joan had invested him with a charming confidence.

"A very pretty pair," rejoined his uncle, and looked sarcastic, but Basil did not care a chip.

For several minutes they both stood silently considering the picture; then the colonel spoke again. "Why did you not tell me of this before? Any young fellow might lose his heart to so rare a beauty without shame."

“ I was not ashamed, sir, but I had not then a right to speak of the lady as I have now,” replied Basil.

“ She is very young, not more than sixteen—and who is she, if I may ask ? ” said the elder man, still critically viewing the picture.

“ Come over to Frankfort with me to-morrow, sir, and judge her for yourself. When you see her, you will not say, ‘ Who is she ? ’ but ‘ She is perfect. ’ ”

The Colonel appeared irritated at this evasion. “ When you know me a little better, Basil, you will know that I like a plain answer to a plain question, and that I am a man with opinions of my own,” said he. “ I will not ask you again, ‘ Who is this lady ? ’—he is a fine artist that painted her, but all his art has not served him to hide her peasantry. She is not a woman of race, exquisite as she is.”

“ That is true, sir,” replied Basil. “ Her father is the village schoolmaster at Ashford, where my sister is married to the rector, and her mother is a handsome rustic matron, who cannot

so much as read her Bible. But Joan has a lady for her godmother, and by her and her blind son, a clergyman, she has been trained and taught. A sweeter young gentlewoman, or one better bred or better educated, you will not find amongst all the gentlewomen of your acquaintance. She is at Frankfort with her friends now. I wish, sir, you would come there with me, and let her prove her charms upon yourself. I'll answer for it that you will not be disappointed."

The countenance of Colonel Godfrey underwent a variety of changes as he listened to his nephew's very explicit *amende*. He did not lose his temper, but he was very near it. "My dear fellow, I was never curious to know the colour of the rope with which a man meant to hang himself," said he contemptuously. "I understand that you were in love with this lady before my poor boy's calamity opened for you the succession to Whinmore, and that since you have entered into a formal engagement. You would have done more wisely—perhaps more kindly also—to wait. It is your ambition to get on in the

world, and you will make very few steps indeed before you find out the importance of family connections—you know best whether hers are likely to help you. I shall not encourage or help to publish what appears, from my point of view, a premature, foolish, and needless entanglement—but I have no right to say more. You are your own master—I will not interfere with your private affairs of this nature. I wish I could have spoken otherwise, for you are my heir, and I desire to be not your kinsman only, but your friend.”

“I am sure of that, sir,” replied Basil, rather cowed and not at all angry. “Let us be silent on the subject until you can speak otherwise. I am pledged in honour no less than in affection, and you are not the man would have me forfeit such a pledge.”

“Assuredly not. I should prefer to see you playing at love in a cottage, or enacting Darby and Joan at Whinmore. But I have a fear lest some day the temptation may come upon yourself to shirk it—that is all,” and having thus delivered himself the Colonel turned aside from contem-

plating the picture, and Basil, without any reply, proceeded to close and secure the case which hid it from eyes profane.

His mission had not been a success. Here was the first stone that ruffled the course of his true love. When he returned to Frankfort to take leave of Joan before going home to England, he could not hide from her the rebuff he had sustained at his kinsman's hands. But he made the most eloquent protestations of worship and constancy, and Joan believed every beautiful word. Did she not love him, and was she not still in the age of pure, undoubting, holy faith? And was not he too? If his lips had not been touched with the fire of passionate truth he would hardly have kindled the vestal fires of her young heart. They had confidence in each other, and Basil, to indemnify himself for Colonel Godfrey's inappreciativeness of his darling, prolonged his stay at Frankfort until the week's end. It was impossible, even if it had been desirable, to keep his kinsman's sentiments a secret all that time from Mr. and Mrs. Paget. They were distressed,

almost resentful, but it was against Basil, and the curate took him to talk to alone.

“Colonel Godfrey ought to have been taken into account and consulted before ever you came here,” said he.

“I am beyond the years of pupilage,” replied Basil. “I am my own master.”

“To a certain extent. But in accepting your present position with regard to your uncle you tacitly accepted the obligations of a son. He is hurt and angry, and I am not surprised at it. You ought, at least, to have warned him of your intention before making your engagement with our dear girl, and to have won some sort of acquiescence before promulgating it amongst her relations. He might have had a word to say that would have induced you to pause, to think again, perhaps to change your views.”

“They will never change!” exclaimed Basil eagerly. “You don’t know how far higher than the pomps and vanities of the world I set Joan’s love!”

“I will endeavour to imagine it. You are full

of the fervour and enthusiasm of youth—you will value justice also by-and-by. Colonel Godfrey is an old soldier and a man of honour ; not one, as you describe him, to impose penalties for any offence against himself. But rely upon it, you have struck a blow at a good heart by keeping close counsel until he has no alternative but to let events take their course. Joan is like other very young women—her feelings were a little touched when we came abroad, and I do not profess to say that she would have forgotten you in a week, but neither do I think that her pangs would have been severe if your parting at Ashford had been final. *Now* it might be different—a slight blast blows up a great fire, and none of us would perhaps like the hazard of trying to put it out.”

“ There is no quarrel between my uncle and myself on this matter, sir,” said Basil, in a tone of remonstrance.

“ No ; if I conjecture rightly there is a truce in which he anticipates that it may come to a natural end.”

“ I know not what he anticipates, nor do I care

if that be it," exclaimed the lover, with hot indignation. "Joan has patience and I have hope. I will take my brother-in-law Franklyn's advice, and prepare myself for independence."

"In what way? What does the rector counsel? Something wise I've not a doubt."

"That I should return to Oxford and get my degree, and then enter at the Temple. But that is rather too long an outlook. At all events I will go back to Oxford. I suppose they'll re-admit me, sir. I was rusticated for barricading doors and painting the college pump scarlet. I always liked a bit of colour in a landscape."

"You always perpetrated your follies first, sir, and then took the consequences carelessly. I have no doubt your college will re-admit if you make proper application. I am glad to see you have the courage of close study left—it will keep you out of further mischief."

Basil knew his lecture was over—his ineffectual lecture. He was not half so much moved by it as by one reproachful look and word from Mrs. Paget.

"I have to answer to God and her father and

mother for Joan ; don't make a plaything of her heart and break it, Basil."

He took the old lady's hand and vowed he would be true as steel to her child. And the next day he brought a beautiful betrothal ring of engraved gold, and with great tenderness and solemnity put it upon Joan's hand.

" You have no doubts or fears of me, Joan ? " said he, sealing it with a kiss.

" Not one, Basil, not one."

And in that mood they made their farewells for the second time.

XXXII.

A COURSE OF READING-LESSONS.

It was a brilliant August day in the drawing-room of a house on the west side of Clapham Common, and there sat Emmot Torre—the rustic Emmot converted by clothes into the semblance of a young lady of fashion, and surrounded by all the properties and proprieties of respectable middle-class life. On her lap was a volume of Knight's *Half Hours of English History*, with which she was indulgently supposed to be improving her mind, while she yawned over it without reading it. It was no part of the duty of Mr. and Mrs. Seamer, to whose guidance and guardianship she had been entrusted, to urge her to study against her will; but she had herself discerned the necessity of refining her provincial accent, and of acquiring a

veneer of useful knowledge. They were to give her protection, society, and a home, in consideration of receiving two hundred pounds a year, and were to make her as much one with their own family as possible. They might marry her in their own circle if an eligible opportunity offered, and were authorized to promise with her a dower of five thousand pounds. The agent who had made these arrangements for her was a dry old chip of a lawyer whose chambers were in Gray's Inn—the safe depositary of many such secrets touching the honour of families.

Emmot knew all she seemed ever likely to know of her father and patron, and that was absolutely nothing; but she knew her position and her prospects thoroughly, and neither quite satisfied her; they were too defined, too obvious, plain, and practical for even false romance. Mr. and Mrs. Seamer were worthy, matter-of-fact people, who thought a daily drive in a pony-chaise about the Surrey lanes delightful enjoyment, and a rare visit to Drury Lane or Covent Garden almost extravagant dissipation. They were elderly also, and

late hours did not suit them. Mr. Seamer had a study upstairs garnished with cases of specimens—queer, dried, crawling things, of which he furnished descriptions weekly to the entomological department of a juvenile magazine. Mrs. Seamer had her house to manage, her garden and conservatory to supervise, and the newspaper to learn for her husband, who liked to hear the news at meals instead of reading it, which subtracted too much time from his insects. Their family consisted of one son, a tutor at Oxford, and one daughter, Elizabeth, a young woman of five-and-twenty, fond of mooning and meditation, very plain, and much given to the utterance of satirical speeches. On this daughter Emmot was chiefly thrown for companionship, and she liked her, because, as she expressed it, she did not care what she said to her. Whether this facile confidence was encouraged by a large sympathy or a lax principle in Elizabeth, Emmot was quite incapable of discovering. She only knew that Elizabeth was extremely good-natured, and never read her tiresome homilies—that she was, in fact, politic.

They were together this morning, Elizabeth mending her gloves, the only needlework to which her great mind condescended, while Emmot took what she pleasantly called a Reading Lesson. She found it terribly dull; fatiguing as a long walk on tip-toe; and with a vast sigh, she clapt to the book, and declared she would read no more.

Elizabeth invited her to write, then. "No," said she, "I'll sing."

Emmot's was a superb contralto voice: neither she herself, nor those about her, nor even the singing mistress who came to instruct her once a week, quite knew how fine, how rare an organ she possessed. She had the intense pleasure in exercising it that arises from the dawning consciousness of power. Elizabeth, busy with her gloves, declined, for the present, to play her accompaniments, so she walked to and fro the room, and sang without one a lovely pathetic air that she had caught by ear at a Clapham amateur concert. Mocking the manner of the singer, she infused some soul into her voice, and the glove-mender

looked at her with a shrewd, sarcastic smile to see that she had positively sung the tears into her own eyes.

"You born actress, when you don't feel it any more than your shoe," exclaimed she.

Emmot stopt, half surprised, half angry. "I am not pretending, Elizabeth."

"No. I called you actress, not hypocrite."

The singer resumed her singing, but for a moment only. At a sudden thought she checked herself, and halting in front of Elizabeth, said with intense seriousness: "Elizabeth, I should *like* to be an actress—to go upon the stage. That would suit me, and I was told by somebody that I should shine there."

"Who was 'somebody?'"

"Mr. Baines, the artist who painted me in his picture of 'The Well-Dressers.'"

Elizabeth again raised her eyes from her gloves, slowly, deliberately scanning Emmot's figure from slipper to top-knot, and then said: "You have a very proper presence for the stage, but there goes to the making of a successful actress much

more than a fine shape, a pretty face and an expressive voice."

"What more? Natural gifts are the best foundation."

"Hard work such as you have not by any means developed a taste for yet."

"Hard work! I hate the name of hard work! Could you be an actress, Elizabeth?"

"No, I could never believe enough in my parts. Besides, I am an ugly woman, and self-conscious and nervous."

"You think your queer way of dressing becomes you, but I fancy you would look nicer if you wore your things more like other people."

Elizabeth was eccentric chiefly for distinction's sake, and she had enough grotesquerie of face and person to ensure it, though not always of a complimentary kind. "I do not admire 'other people' sufficiently to copy them," said she. "Dress me as you would, I should never have the air of 'other people.'"

"You are afraid of being thought *common*, that is it; everybody here seems afraid of being

thought *common*, and very few are anything else, are they? ”

Elizabeth coloured and was uneasy. Emmot's accent was much ameliorated, but she had not yet forgotten her cottage-bred plainness of speech. Elizabeth, who always felt that there was a vein of malice in her primitive sagacity, adopted for the nonce her too candid tone, and replied,—

“The majority are common in appearance by you, but they can all read without spelling; and if a girl is pretty, we are not disenchanted the moment she opens her mouth to speak.”

Emmot accepted these broad hints, and only laughed. “And the more genteel folks try to be, the less like gentlefolks they make themselves,” continued she. “Clapham is so genteel that it is duller than Ashleigh—ever so much duller.”

“Would you like to go back to Ashleigh now you have known Clapham?—that is the test.”

“Yes, I should! I wish I were there at this minute, fetching water from the spring on the green to boil the potatoes for aunt's and my dinner.”

"You wish you were there for an hour's gossip, to show your smart clothes, and make your old companions envious of the lady you have become, living in London."

"You are a witch, Elizabeth! You're as deep as Sythe Wardlaw!"

"It does not take much witchcraft to see through *you*."

This exchange of compliments was perfectly good-humoured. Neither meant to sting and neither did sting, but Emmot was quite serious in denouncing the dulness of Clapham. She felt it infinitely wearisome to look out, day after day, over the pretty expanse of common, and never to see anybody coming or going that she knew. It had been much livelier sitting by her aunt's case-ment, peeping between the plants that made a blind, to watch the familiar faces pass; much livelier sweethearting with poor Martin Kempe or Rowland Wardlaw in the twilight lanes than it was drowsing after dinner under a hot chandelier in company with Mr. and Mrs. Seamer and Elizabeth.

She was now precisely in that vacant, vivacious condition of mind and matter when Satan was pretty sure to find her soon some mischief to do. No Clapham swains had come a-wooing to her yet, and without a lover, Emmot was lost. The Oxford long vacation was begun, and Mr. John Seamer was expected at home that evening: he would be stiff and pragmatrical and over-solemn of course, but he would be somebody masculine for a variety, she thought. And not only did she think it in her heart, but she asked questions of Elizabeth about him, and Elizabeth, who was shrewdness incarnate, was perfectly aware of her disposition towards her innocent brother.

“John is very short-sighted,” said she in answer to one inquiry; “so short-sighted that he may live a month in the house with a woman, and never discover whether she is fair or tawny, blue-eyed or black,—but he is no fool.” Emmot sighed audibly and Elizabeth laughed. “You will not find him at all serviceable for purposes of flirtation, if that is what you are cogitating,” added she.

Emmot was not affronted; she only reiterated

her conviction that Clapham was "awfully slow," and expressed her hope that they should soon have a change.

"We shall have a month by the sea. John has a pupil to read with him this vacation, and he will want to go somewhere quiet. Most likely we shall go to the same place as he fixes on."

"I wish it may be to Scarbro' then, or to Brighton—they are so gay."

"That I am sure it will not be. John is fond of the Isle of Wight, and so are we all."

"Ryde then, or Cowes?"

"No, neither Ryde nor Cowes would suit John. Possibly it may be Shanklyn or Ventnor, but, more possibly Freshwater or Niton, where there is nothing but sea and down."

"Then I'd as lief stay at Clapham!" cried Emmot with comic despair.

"Oh, no, you would not; there are always chances in change. You need be in no hurry to marry: *that* life, as *I* see it, is duller than any. Contented respectability with a competence is all prose. How should you like to be turned into a

young edition of my mother, with her key-basket and her store-room, and perhaps a nursery full of children—unruly children?”

Emmot shuddered. “I hate children; little plagues!” said she.

“A very unwomanly sentiment, my dear,” replied Elizabeth. “Pray, keep it to yourself.”

“Not I! Why should I keep it to myself? I *do* hate children—they are always in the way.”

“Go on with your reading-lesson; we have had enough of abstract questions for one morning.”

“What do you mean by abstract questions?” Emmot carelessly inquired, and Elizabeth not replying, she re-opened her volume, and continued her voluntary penance of study until noon, at which hour she and Elizabeth took their daily walk on the Common before lunch.

After lunch ensued an interval of ornamental needlework and sultry endurance of callers in the drawing-room, and at four o'clock came round the pony-carriage to take them for a drive to Streatham. When they returned towards six, Emmot passed a portmanteau and carpet-bag in

the hall, and Elizabeth went to the study, saying, "I suppose John has arrived. These are his dear old battered traps that have served him ever since he went to college."

John Seamer had arrived, and was in the drawing-room with his father, mother, and sister when Emmot entered, dressed for dinner. They had been speaking of her before she appeared, and their abrupt silence made her aware of it. She was not confused, but gratified, rather. Curiosity and expectation were in the mind of the damsel suffering under the vague complaint of *tedium vitæ*, and curiosity and expectation were also in the mind of the learned and busy Oxford tutor. She saw a tall, upright, black figure of a man, surmounted by a pale, serious, smooth-shaven face, and he saw an airy white form, with flowing golden hair and a blue breast-knot, holding a vivid crimson rose—not more vivid than the dewy carnation of her lips. We have Elizabeth's word for it that John was short-sighted—but he was sensible of Emmot's beauty; and that he was no fool—which remains to be proved.

"Now, mamma, take my arm; John will give his to Miss Torre and Elizabeth," said old Mr. Seamer with a good-humoured, significant nod, and so led the way to the dining-room. Emmot was seated side by side with the new-comer, Elizabeth opposite to him.

His sister had apprised John Seamer that Emmot was a "perfect dunce," that it was of no use to make company-conversation for her; and being hungry, he applied himself to his soup, his fish, his mutton, as if he were unconscious of the pretty woman at his elbow, who also had a hearty, healthy appetite, and did not disguise it. The first words he addressed to her were: "Have you ever seen Richmond Park? No—then I will drive you over to-morrow." Emmot smiled a pleased acquiescence, and Mrs. Seamer suggested that if they went so far they had better go before luncheon.

"But Emmot has her lessons in the morning," interposed Elizabeth. "Mrs. Jones comes at eleven."

Mrs Jones was the singing-mistress. "You see I have not yet done going to school," said

Emmot to the Oxford tutor with the shyest, sweetest, rosiest blush. She might be ever such a dunce, he thought, but it would be delightful to have the teaching of her.

Mr. Seamer asked his wife the news of the day. "Nothing," said she, "but rumours of war;" and the old man turned off to his insects. He had lately received from a scientific friend in Brazil something new in moths. He described it to his son, and when the cloth was drawn, he went to his study aloft and brought it down to exhibit. John Seamer was beautifully courteous and respectful to his parents. He did not care a straw for flies and beetles, but he would listen by the hour to his father's enthusiastic proses. The ladies left them in the midst of one now, and retired to the drawing-room, where Mrs. Seamer deliberately put herself to sleep in the couch corner. Elizabeth took a book, and made belief to read, that Emmot might not be tempted to tease her with pithless talk, and Emmot amused herself by looking in the glass, humming tunes under her breath, and wishing for John Seamer.

He came in presently by the conservatory, and invited his sister to join him in the garden. Elizabeth went. Emmot fancied herself slighted, overlooked, and was piqued. It does not need that a woman should be highly cultivated to be dexterous in the use of pique. Mother-wit taught Emmot the value and service of her natural weapons, and by-and-by, when Elizabeth called to her to go into the garden also, she was too busy binding a new song with cherry ribbon to comply.

“ John has finished his after-dinner cigar,” added Elizabeth, in an explanatory, conciliatory way.

“ Oh, I don’t mind smoke,” rejoined Emmot, and drew her needle gracefully in and out while John waited at the window.

He suggested that it was a lovely evening, and quite a mistake to stay indoors, and then he inquired of his sister if the nightingales had sung as much this summer as they sang last. Elizabeth thought they had sung even more ; and as Emmot made no sign of leaving her work, the

brother and sister strolled again down the garden together, and did not come in until summoned to tea.

Emmot was then prettily assisting the old lady, and her little bit of perverse temper seemed over. The gas was lit, but the glass door into the conservatory was left open, and she chose to sit by it for the pleasant air—John too. Elizabeth underestimated the conversational talents of her companion. Emmot, it is true, had no book lore beyond cottage tracts and cheap romances, but she had observation, taste, and memory, and her very ignorance gave her prattle a flavour of originality. John Seamer had also tact to draw her out. Elizabeth once overheard him say, “Indeed, I never knew that before;”—sign that Emmot was telling him something strange—absolutely instructing the Oxford scholar.

“What is that you never knew before, John?” his sister inquired.

It was a bit of Derbyshire folk-lore, and on examination Emmot was found well up in the subject. Old Mr. Seamer gave his attention,

and for half-an-hour or more she kept them well amused with her odds and ends of antiquity. She betrayed no uncomfortableness of recollection even when the Ashleigh Well-Dressing and the religious services that accompanied it were mentioned. John Seamer said, "The original of that ceremony is the same that was practised at Domremy on the Eve of the Ascension, in Jeanne d'Arc's time."

"Jeanne d'Arc?" echoed Emmot, interrogatively.

"The story will make you a charming reading-lesson, more entertaining than any novel. You shall read it to me," said John.

"But tell me *now* who she was," Emmot demanded, with pretty childish impatience.

John declined to satisfy her; bade her keep her curiosity until the morrow; grew quite playful at her rosy pettishness. Elizabeth looked on and listened with indolent scorn, turning over in her mind the sentence of the three young men before King Darius. Wine is strong: strong is the king: but strongest are women. She likened

John to the king, and Emmot to Apame, his concubine, sitting at his right hand, taking the crown from his head, setting it on her own, smiting him, and the king gaping and gazing upon her with open mouth ; if she laughed, he laughing also ; if she took any displeasure, the king fain to flatter that she might be reconciled to him again. Elizabeth despised her brother as she watched him, his eyes fixed fast on Emmot.

“John,” said she, abruptly, “in which of the Apocryphal Scriptures is it written that women are the strongest power ; that men have run out of their wits for women, have become servants for their sakes, have perished, have erred and sinned for women ?”

“In the first book of Esdras. Zerobabel is the young sage who proclaims it ; but he adds that above all things truth beareth away the victory.”

Whatever under-current of thought ran at that moment from Elizabeth's mind to her brother's, it was carefully suppressed. Emmot's guilty, vain conscience pricked her for an instant with the remembrance of her unhappy lovers, but the pang

was as transient as the blush it sent to her cheek. John had risen from his seat opposite to her, and had gone away into the room, their laughing colloquy suddenly cut short by Elizabeth's apparently irrelevant inquiry — which was by no means so irrelevant as it sounded to the ear. A few minutes after entered the maids for family prayers, which were followed by a general dispersion. Emmot closed her eyes that night with an agreeable sense of something to come on the morrow in alleviation of Clapham dulness — to wit, her reading-lesson with a new teacher, and the drive to Richmond Park. She was certainly thankful for small mercies.

The reading-lesson first. After breakfast John called Emmot into the study.

“We are going to be good friends,” said he with easy good-humour and self-possession. He had taken thought with himself, and counsel with his sister, and had quite recovered his balance of common-sense—or fancied so.

Emmot replied artlessly, “Yes, I hope so,” and looked as blooming as midsummer in her crisp

pink muslin attire—a bunch of roses, nothing less pretty and sweet. But John averted his eyes from her beauty, and bent his mind to business; his tongue too, and that in a bit of very plain-speaking.

“Elizabeth flatters nobody, and she tells me you cannot read long words without spelling—is that true?” said he, and unintentionally looked down on her face, which was looking up at him. It was impossible so to meet her gaze without smiling indulgently. John smiled indulgently, of course.

Again Emmot responded with an acquiescent monosyllable; she was in a sweetly docile mood—innocent as six years old. She could act that character perfectly when it suited her—as if her wisdom teeth were yet all to cut. John was quite hoodwinked and deceived by her meek airs, and would have much preferred more spirit first thing in the morning, being himself an active, energetic-tempered person, born for a schoolmaster. He would have bidden her rouse herself, but was afraid of hurting her feelings; so he subdued

himself, and gave her to read the story of Jeanne d'Arc as it was told in a volume of *Good Women's Lives* for girls, amending its incorrectness and amplifying its details from his own better knowledge as he went on. According to custom, he was soon more interested in the lesson than in the pupil, and it was quite a discouraging shock to him at the end, when he endeavoured to question her on it, to find that she could make him no answers whatever :—that she had, in fact, not given her attention at all to the subject matter of her reading.

“ You have been thinking of something else all the time,” said he.

“ Are we to go to Richmond Park before lunch ? ” was her inquiry in reply. John did not answer. “ Oh, no, we cannot—there is Mrs. Jones at eleven,” added she softly, shyly, as a child that dreads displeasure.

The clever Oxford tutor had small opinion of women as teachers, and had told his sister, *à propos* of Emmot, that if she was really *un-taught*, and not *ill-taught*, he would take her in hand during the vacation, promising that she would learn more in

a few weeks with him than in a year with her. Elizabeth treated this as an instance of the conceit of men, and sarcastically suggested that it might turn out a case of mutual instruction—Emmot knowing many things of which he was in blessed ignorance. John ridiculed her fears. He had never been so much as singed by any light of love, and he valued himself on his invulnerability. A fellow and tutor does not want to marry early. He was too young and ambitious to barter his independence for a dunce of a beauty, with a dower of five thousand pounds and no available family connections; and he was much too old and wary to be taken by limed twigs. He should have a college living in his turn, and should marry a don's daughter. Meanwhile was there any sound reason why he should not help forward the neglected education of the damsel who had been entrusted to his mother's chaperonage?—was there any reason why? Elizabeth could advance none save the perils of Emmot's fairness and fascination.

“I should not like to have her for *my* sister-in-law,” said she.

“And as little should I like to have an uncultivated woman for my wife,” was his rejoinder. And in this frame of mind he gave Emmot her first reading-lesson—and felt it was not a success, though when Elizabeth, with a mischievous gleam in her eyes, asked him how they had managed, he told her that they had managed very well :—Emmot had a full flexible voice.

But Emmot had met her beforehand with a face of fun and an expressive gesture that implied anything but a good lesson, and had whispered : “He is as savage as a bear because I could not answer his questions on my reading—you never used to ask me any questions.”

“That was my neglect—he says I am a careless teacher.”

Mrs. Jones’s visit was over at a quarter to twelve, and precisely at twelve came the pony-carriage to the door. Emmot inquired who was going to Richmond Park besides herself and John, and was told, nobody—they were quite load enough for the pony in so long a drive. She was very glad ; conscious that she was the best company

in a *tête-à-tête*, and not at all afraid of her wise and serious companion; she had hitherto found men so pleased and flattered by her smiles that she was confident of pleasing and charming the very best.

John Seamer was no whip, and the pony soon made that discovery to his own entire satisfaction. The day was warm, and he determined to take his time—to walk up the hills and to walk down the hills, and on no account to make a toil of his pleasure. John addressed him as Teddy, and begged him to go a little faster, but Teddy not proving responsive, he added with supreme good-nature that it was of no use to hurry him, as they had plenty of time,—all the afternoon, indeed, before them.

“Let me drive; I’ll make him go!” gushed Emmot expansively.

“No, no, he’ll do, he’ll do. I do not like to see an animal distressed.”

“Distressed!” echoed Emmot, and tuned up in the merriest mocking laugh.

Rapid butcher-boys grinned, omnibus conductors grinned, hot pedestrians smiled at Teddy taking his

ease with the tall philosopher and the beautiful girl behind him. Once in a busy part of the road, he came to a full stop, and then in a tone of hurt remonstrance, John did say: "Come, Teddy, come, this is *too* bad," when Teddy, as if seized with a spasm of remorse, mended his pace for fifty yards or so, but soon relapsed into a lazy, unprincipled lounge. Emmot begged to know how far off Richmond Park was. John believed it was about ten miles off, and he did not exactly know the way, but he supposed there were guide-posts, and if not they could ask. She then inquired if he was accustomed to drive, and he frankly confessed that he was not; that he did not remember ever to have driven before; his sister generally took the reins.

"I hope we shall not have a spill then before we get home again," said Emmot with gravity.

"Oh, no, Teddy is very safe, and when we are clear of the houses, where there is no traffic, we shall do."

"There is one comfort—Teddy is over fat to run away."

"You are not afraid of my driving, are you?"

"No—but I've more confidence in Teddy's discretion than in your skill." This little impertinence was so prettily said that it was more agreeable than a compliment,—John laughed, and liked it evidently.

Soon they were in green lanes; hedges to right and hedges to left, with fine timber trees, and occasional chimney-smoke curling up from amidst bowery gardens. The sky overhead was blue and the sun bright, but there was a pleasant breeze that dispersed all sultriness. They did not talk much. Emmot had a luxurious nature that placidly enjoyed sweet sights and sounds, delicious perfumes, and agreeable motion. She reclined in her place, softly sensible to the beauty of the day, and the warm, lulling noontide stillness. John did not care for continuous talk, and the silence suited him too. He thought her a very nice, sensible, natural girl, who with judicious training might be made anything of:—he thought a great deal, and much unwisely.

Presently they came to a wide expanse of open

common ; the horizon a dim circle of wooded hills, the foreground broken into rude hillocks and pits whence sand and gravel had been dug, and where water had lodged, and lay in low stagnant pools. The day here was shadeless, blazing, but the wind blew over the waste, and kept it cool.

And at last to Richmond Park where the turf rose and fell in long sunny slopes of emerald sheen, and dappled herds gathered under leafy broad trees lifted their beautiful heads for a startled moment, and then fled to secluded ferny brakes and deeper solitude. It was nearly six o'clock when Teddy brought them back to Clapham, safe, without accident. They had been so many hours together, and were not weary. John heard Emmot tell his sister that they had had a most charming drive, and he was of that opinion too.

And the next day he gave her another reading-lesson, selecting a good comedy for the purpose in the hope of interesting her, and the day after that again, and so on for more than a week ; and each lesson was better than the last, until one morning he said to Elizabeth : “ Come into the study and

hear what progress my pupil has made. You will be astonished ; she is a very clever girl."

Elizabeth declined. "I know," said she. "Do you think she keeps it to herself. She practises between whiles with me. She is a lovely parrot, and will echo whatever you teach her. She is in her room at this moment declaiming ; she fancies herself already fit to face an audience. I suppose she has confided to you her wish to become an actress ?"

"What !" cried John with voice and face of such dismay that Elizabeth saw at once Emmot had not been by any means so communicative as she gave her credit for.

"She is ambitious of going upon the stage : I thought you had chosen plays to read on that account."

"Nothing of the kind ; it was simply to teach her to read and to speak at the same time."

Elizabeth said no more. She perceived that her brother was angry, and she was not surprised to find on the following morning that he was too busy to hear Emmot read. As little was she surprised

on the next morning after that to find his press of business over, and himself quite at leisure to resume his course of lessons.

Emmot's witchcraft began to work, and Clapham was almost an amusing place.

XXXIII.

A NIGHT AT THE PLAY.

MRS. SEAMER had promised Emmot several times, "When John comes home we will have a night at the play," and Emmot was determined not to let the promise lapse for want of recalling it to the good lady, who was apt to forget pledges she had no particular wish to redeem. "You need not go if you don't like; we are old enough to take care of ourselves," suggested the lively girl one morning as they were talking the matter over at breakfast. •

Elizabeth winced. John was silent for a minute and reflective; then, as everybody else was silent, he said sententiously, "That is true; surely I am escort enough: we need not drag you and my father out against your inclination."

“The theatres are so very hot at this time of the year,” said the mother, plaintively.

“Quite insufferable ; it is a marvel to me how anybody can sit a play out in the dog-days,” added the scientific old gentleman.

So it was arranged that John Seamer should take his sister and Emmot to Drury Lane that evening.

“Bid her dress quietly—her appearance is so striking,” the Oxford man whispered to his wise counsellor and kinswoman.

Elizabeth understood him, and passed his advice on to Emmot, who laughed and obeyed it. But her beauty was too resplendent to be disguised—simplicity of attire seemed to leave it the more conspicuous. When she came downstairs in a white dress, with a string of jet beads round her throat, and a jet arrow confining the coils of her luxuriant hair, she looked as remarkable as handsome young woman can look. She had an air of distinction, too, and for anything a casual observer would notice might have stepped out of a chamber in a king’s palace. John gazed, admired, and wished

he had secured a private box at the theatre instead of seats in the dress circle.

Emmot was thinking less of herself and of what effect she was producing than usual. Her mind was full of happy, excited anticipations of what she was going to see. Her single visit to the theatre at Derby comprised the whole of her experience of theatres; and though Drury Lane is not very brilliant, nor the company very resplendent in August, the scene had a lively effect on her imagination. The play was *The Lady of Lyons*, and her attention never once wandered from the stage. She seemed to feel all the alternations of Pauline's passion, and to sympathize in all her sentiments; between the acts even she declined to talk. Elizabeth knew what she was dreaming of—she was wishing she were the actress whom the audience so warmly applauded. At last it was over, the lovers were made happy, and with a low, contented sigh, Emmot turned to John and said, "I should like to come to the theatre every night."

"You would tire of it," replied he, suppressing

a yawn. He had seen the play before, and was less interested than the new country girl. As for Elizabeth, she was sleepy, and said so. They had both sacrificed themselves to give Emmot pleasure, and she was evidently pleased, which was so far good; but they thought now they might go, they had seen enough, and it was a long drive to Clapham. They therefore made a move to depart.

“ Ah, Mr. Seamer, is that you? then you don’t stay for the after-piece?” said a young gentleman to John as he rose. The speaker was Mr. Gerrard Spencer of Whorlstone, who had been seated behind Emmot Torre all the evening. He was staying in town with his uncle, Mr. Welby Spencer, and had come to the theatre in attendance on his aunt Amelia, and his two cousins, Belle and Blanche, rosy, healthy, well-developed girls, very “jolly” in their own vernacular, and popular and amiable in most other people’s of their acquaintance.

Emmot overheard the question about the after-piece, and observed that scarcely anybody was

leaving but themselves. "Oh, *do* stay, if it isn't all over!" said she, in a loud, energetic whisper, catching at John's arm. Elizabeth glanced at her brother. Emmot continued her expostulation, forgetting her lately-acquired proprieties of speech in her earnestness. "Let me have a see at the play-bill. I'd rather not have come if I'd known we were to leave i' the middle. It's a throwing away o' money, that it is!"

John sat down again, Elizabeth too—anything to stop that audible ebullition of Emmot's Ashleigh tongue. The Oxford man's countenance was dark for five minutes after, and his sister's pale face was crimson with confusion; but Emmot, overjoyed at the extension of her pleasure, was quite unconscious of the distress she had caused. She read the bill of the play, her lips forming the words, and was blind to the furtive amused stare with which several persons near regarded her. But she was presently not deaf to Miss Belle Spencer's inquiry of her cousin Gerrard, "Who is that girl with your friend, who looks like Beauty and speaks like Beast?" She

heard it, cautious as it was, and her ears tingled. Elizabeth heard it also, and when Emmot turned her head sharply to look at the speaker, her heart leapt for fear that she was about to launch some repartee at her. But she did not ; she only kept her tongue more discreetly for the rest of the terrible night, and looked a degree lovelier for the colour of shame her lapse brought into her cheeks.

The after-piece was a ridiculous farce, and Emmot laughed with a surprised and surprising appreciation of the points. Gerrard Spencer was so placed that he could watch the changes in her physiognomy while his mind wandered into curious speculations on how the village enchantress of Ashleigh had fallen into familiar association with that grave and reverend signor, his Oxford tutor. Gerrard was the pupil who was going to read with John Seamer this vacation, and he wished that his cousin Belle, who had a family reputation for wit, would not make such free public use of it. He perceived that Emmot and Elizabeth had caught her pungent inquiry, and he believed that Seamer

had caught it too. For the moment he was more vexed and ashamed of Belle than John and his sister were of Emmot.

When they were all finally rising to go, Gerrard arrested his tutor to ask if he had decided yet where they were to spend their studious vacation. John said he had not, and Belle whispered a few hasty words in Gerrard's ear, in obedience to which he informed John that his uncle Welby Spencer had taken a house for a couple of months at Folkestone.

"And you would like to go to Folkestone, too?" replied the tutor. "Come and see me about it to-morrow before noon. Folkestone might suit us too, Elizabeth?" John nodded Gerrard his *congé* for the present. He was in a hurry to escape; he did not like the notice Emmot attracted, turning her head, and flashing her eyes here, there, everywhere, and could not well consider his words. But the upshot of them was an arrangement by which the two families were to meet at Folkestone early in the following week.

Emmot had recovered from the temporary check

administered by Belle Spencer, and was noisily excited and garrulous throughout the drive home. Twenty times John Seamer wished it at an end; and when he and Elizabeth had a private minute in the study after, he lectured her for not teaching Emmot better and quieter manners.

“ Her manners are natural to her,” said Elizabeth. “ She has not the modest instincts of a good woman.”

“ She will never have another night at the play with me,” rejoined John.

His sister congratulated herself that his peril from Emmot’s fascinations was past.

XXXIV.

CUPID VERSUS MINERVA.

THE Seamers were fortunate in securing apartments at Folkestone in the house adjoining that which Mr. Welby Spencer had taken, and the two families were naturally thrown more together than they otherwise need have been. Emmot Torre had now the opportunity of studying the ways and customs of girls in the rank to which she had been raised, and having her wits about her, she did not trifle with it. Blanche and Belle Spencer had enjoyed all the advantages of a liberal education in London, and they were moreover by disposition good-natured; and their cousin Lexcey, who had been invited up from Whorlstone to share their sea-side holiday, was a perfectly well-bred provincial gentlewoman. Not

one of them had Emmot's beauty, however, or her native cleverness, and they did not quite "take-to" her, though, being partially informed of her circumstances, they were very polite. Emmot was satisfied; for she did not discern that the little formality with which they fenced their intercourse was a barrier set up against the cordial, real intimacy into which nice girls are ever ready to rush with other girls who suit them.

Mr. John Seamer's original plan had been to have lodgings with his pupil independent of their friends. But Gerrard's aunt Amelia hospitably scouted the idea. "There is room enough and to spare in our house," said she. "It is a large house, and why should you be at the expense of lodgings when you can live with us, and Lexcey will, of course, prefer to have you under the same roof as herself—she complains that she scarcely sees anything of you now."

Gerrard still demurred. The tutor had made a special point of private rooms to themselves, lest the studious object of the vacation should be defeated by perpetual inroads of amusement.

Aunt Amelia understood Gerrard's hesitation and inquired mischievously what the reading mattered? Gerrard answered with an air of intense propriety that it mattered much—to him; and a transient regret smote his conscience that he had not resisted temptation, and gone away with Mr. Seamer alone to some dull little retreat where there would be no distractions from work in the shape of pretty cousins and village enchantresses.

Lexcey Spencer was delighted with her aunt Amelia's invitation, but her first introduction to her London kinsfolk, as this was, had been rather trying. She came up to town by an early train from the north, and being met at Euston Square by Gerrard and her uncle, was carried straight to the London Bridge Station, where her aunt and cousins waited her arrival. She had hardly time to draw breath before they all started off for Folkestone, which they reached in time for late dinner. When Lexcey was new to strangers she had a reserved, dignified air, rather chilling in so young a girl. Belle and Blanche, who were well-

bred free-and-easiness personified, did not understand it, and thought her proud or dull. Aunt Amelia was slightly disconcerted too, and hoped Lexcey would not turn out a damper on her holiday. To go to the sea was as real a holiday for aunt Amelia as for her children at any age. She was inexorably vivacious, and people who could not keep up to her pitch of high spirits she soon tired of, and exchanged for gayer friends. She had never known a day's heart-ache, sickness or privation of comfort, and her buoyancy was irrepressible by any common accident. Her husband, a distinguished lawyer, was grave with an ever-increasing load of professional cares, but her daughters were like herself,—plump, fair, blooming, generous, and always ready for any kind of fun and diversion.

But on the morrow Lexcey came out in her true colours—a happy-tempered girl in whom pleasure brought forth all the blushing softness of beauty. After breakfast she and her cousins bathed in the sea together, and Lexcey was found to have pluck and spirit enough to be very pleasant

company. After the bath again, they were joined by aunt Amelia and Gerrard, who had just performed the introduction of all the Seamers and Emmot Torre. There could be no settling to work until everybody had well inhaled the salt breezes, so they took a loitering walk together along the beach, and by the end of it, seemed to know each other like old acquaintances.

John Seamer was much drawn to Lexcey Spencer ; at first, perhaps, because she was Gerrard's sister, but very soon because she was herself. After all, it was more agreeable to talk with a well-bred, well-educated girl who was pretty, than with a rustic dunce who was pretty ; especially when the well-educated girl was quick and responsive, and manifested an interest in his views and opinions, and a simple respectfulness of attention towards his parents whom he loved and honoured. Elizabeth also was attracted by Lexcey, but she, sharper-sighted than John, discerned soon that the spring of Lexcey's cordiality with the tutor was anxiety about the pupil. Gerrard had talent almost equal to his vanity, and

she believed in his powers, though she knew his weaknesses.

“I hope he will be very industrious, and read hard now,” said she, longing to hear him praised, and to get some favourable prediction for his future from this augur in authority. The rector of St. Giles’s had made great efforts for his son, the eldest of a large double family, and his success was looked forward to with hopeful eagerness.

John replied that Lexcey must help her brother to do his duty—must not let him be tempted out of a morning, or kept in the drawing-room late at night: “If you do, I shall have to quarrel with you all,” added he in good-humoured earnest.

Lexcey laughed pleasantly. “You shall not have to quarrel with me; I shall always be your advocate with Gerrard. It is not long to the examinations now, and we all anticipate that he will come out a double-first—I know who will be woefully disappointed if he does not.”

John Seamer was silent for a moment, Lexcey waiting breathless for an echo to her anticipations; when it came, it was a very distant and uncertain

echo : " Gerrard ought to do well ; I have always impressed upon him that it would be a disgrace if he did not, but I have known men of his character disappoint their friends again and again by getting through with only a pass."

Lexcey was too sanguine to admit the possibility of such a humiliation for her brother, who kept up the hopes of St. Giles's at the loftiest pitch. She threw a proud confident glance at him as he marched on in front, with his cousin Blanche and Emmot Torre, carrying his head high, and with an elated eager air familiar enough to all who knew him well. He was indeed feeling the intoxication of sudden delight in Emmot's presence which his imagination had long since invested with fabulous charms. Blanche's face wore just the suspicion of a pout. Gerrard hardly spoke to her on his right hand ; all his attention was for the enchantress on his left.

Presently the various groups coalesced, and when they scattered again, Lexcey was walking with Elizabeth. Elizabeth was quiet and shy with fashionable strangers like Aunt Amelia and

her girls, but Lexcey she felt she could converse with ; she sympathized with Lexcey's devotion to her brother, and recognized in her a soul not entirely given up to fine clothes and frivolous amusements. Lexcey thought Elizabeth's slightly bitter tone betrayed a disappointed person, and that her affectation of age and gravity was overdone, but she was interested in her because of her manifest unselfishness. That was Elizabeth's great virtue ; she was unselfish. If she could have thrown herself into other people's pleasures as cheerfully as she could give up all pleasure on her own account she would have been a most popular and admirable character ; but the misfortune was that she considered very few things worth the pains of enjoyment. Perhaps she had missed the one thing needful to give a savour to all the rest. Lexcey so interpreted her airs of indifference and sarcasm.

The first days at Folkestone passed in a uniform manner. The girls worked and walked, bathed and talked of a morning, and the gentlemen kept to close quarters with their books ; but of an after-

noon they made excursions in company, and sometimes the two families dined together, and spent the evening in the pursuit of pleasure. They boated, they picnic'ed, they played croquet, they played the piano, they sang, sketched, read poetry and talked it, and Cupid's opportunities were as many as Minerva's, and more various by far.

Emmot Torre was wonderfully attractive at first sight, and had a score of silent admirers on the beach every morning, but she had not a permanent charm for a good man. John Seamer's captivity to her had been very brief; Lexcey Spencer had a spell, less obvious but more subtle, and she had finally broken the bonds of the brilliant enchantress. She was a dear, modest, sensible girl, desirable as any don's daughter, and John had not enjoyed her leisure society for a week before his heart and mind were made up to win her if he could. Elizabeth helped him to court her; his father and mother loved her in advance, and Aunt Amelia looked on contented. She thought if it came to a match, it would be a very good thing, and a very acceptable at St. Giles's,

where there were several younger daughters growing up to be provided for.

But the lover whose love-making was most pronounced was Gerrard Spencer. He made an absolute fool of himself, like a character in an old play; and his vagaries pleased nobody—not even Emmot. He was a dark-browed young man, ugly, harsh-featured, passionate, exacting, jealous. Emmot was not the woman to hold him long in respectful awe; she smiled on him with her natural facility, for want of better sport, but she tired of him every day. He was in such deadly earnest, and reminded her of Martin Kempe in his fits of fierce tenderness and fiercer anger.

Of course, Gerrard's studies prospered none the more for his growing pre-occupation. His sister was disturbed and anxious, and warned him one evening to let Emmot alone, for she was only playing with him. "She'd better not!" rejoined he with a dangerous gleam in his eyes. His tutor was even more perplexed and troubled, and went so far as to propose Emmot's removal to Elizabeth. Elizabeth suggested that it would be easier

for Gerrard and himself to go—but John wanted to remain within reach of Lexcey. So Cupid and Minerva got soon to serious cross-purposes, and, as he has ever done since the world began to go round, Cupid prevailed. His diversions became more frequent, and Minerva's dues were proportionably denied.

Thus far Emmot Torre had always had the better of her lovers, had plagued them to her heart's content; and had never suffered a pang herself. But now was at hand the time, and the man who was to avenge them. Love would not be mocked—he who claims to be lord of all! And if she was without a woman's sweet devotion, she had a great deal of human nature in her, and a great deal of unreasoning passion.

The two families had been a week or rather more at Folkestone when one morning, while taking a walk along the beach before breakfast, Mr. John Seamer fell in with a former college acquaintance similarly employed. It was Basil Godfrey returning from his run abroad, and on his way to the grouse at Whinmore. They had

been at Christchurch together, not men of the same year, for John had taken his degree the term before that in which Basil had suffered rustication. But John had acted as his tutor for a month or two, had liked him and anticipated great things from him, and had therefore grieved in good earnest when the young scapegrace took his name off the college-books, and refused to come back, reformed and humbled, by his punishment. It was with a cordial and lively satisfaction that they now met again. Basil told his former coach that he proposed to renew his connection with Oxford, and asked if he could take him on his list of pupils. John Seamer gladly acceded, promised to bring him through with honours if he would only work, and finally invited him to breakfast; an invitation which Basil accepted as an agreeable exchange for the *table-d'hôte* at the hotel.

As the two gentlemen went up the steps to the lodgings, of which the door stood hospitably wide open, Mistress Emmot Torre was seen descending the stairs, in blue muslin, with her fairest morn-

ing face on, and the tinsel butterfly, that an anonymous somebody had sent her after Ashford feast, fastening the ribbon at her throat. Basil Godfrey recognized butterfly and enchantress at the same instant, and bowed with a slight blush and no introduction, because Emmot bowed first with an intelligent air to him. John Seamer wondered how they came to be acquainted; for Emmot volunteered a greeting to Basil as if this were but a renewal of acquaintance. He answered her, not without perplexity, and still speaking, they entered the room where breakfast was spread, and the old people and Elizabeth were waiting.

XXXV.

LOVE'S CROSS-PURPOSES.

THE windows were open, the room full of sea air and the breath of newly-gathered flowers. "Oh, this is sweet! It makes one feel gloriously living!" murmured Emmot, sighing through her rosy lips, and throwing back her head with an air of ecstatic delight.

John Seamer introduced Basil Godfrey to his father, mother, and sister, and then Emmot with a sudden blush and shy effusion of manner begged him to repeat the ceremonial for her. "I fancied at the first moment I saw a friend when I saw you," said she addressing Basil very prettily when it was over. "But it was just because you belong to my recollection of last Ashford Wakes: you reminded me of home."

Basil's eye fell involuntarily on the brazen butterfly, and what had been only a shrewd suspicion in Emmot's mind became a certainty. He was the sender of the tinsel toy. "It was a very pretty, merry scene in the village that day. I arrived at a fortunate time for seeing Ashford at its best," responded he.

"What a deep, sly, old pedlar that was by The Cross—did you notice him?" Emmot inquired meaningly.

"Oh, yes, I noticed him," said Basil, and laughed. She understood him, and laughed too. He caught her sense of fun in her discovery of him, and added mischievously: "I saw a charming little picture with him in it which our friend Baines should have been there to paint. It was a rustic *belle* trying to coax her sweetheart to buy her a fairing of the pedlar—some cheap, gaudy trinket—and he would not. For my part, I cannot tell how he resisted her."

Emmot blushed a confession legible to all observers, and Basil Godfrey awoke to the absurdity of this pretence of a mutual understanding

which she sought to establish to the exclusion of the rest, and immediately abolished it by directing his conversation to Mrs. Seamer and Elizabeth, in a continuation on the same subject. He asked Elizabeth if she had ever shared in the dissipation of a country feast, and when she said No, he proceeded to give the company in general a lively description of May Day at Ashford, diverging soon to popular festivals abroad, and comparing the ways in which different nationalities set about the business of pleasure. By degrees the talk fell entirely into the hands of the gentlemen, and grew medieval, classical, very learned; and so went on until breakfast was ended, and the time come for John Seamer to adjourn to the study next door.

“I have a pupil down here, reading for the examinations,—Gerrard Spencer, a son of the vicar of Whorlstone,” said he to Basil Godfrey, as he rose from the table to go. “Perhaps you know him or his people?”

“Vicar of Whorlstone? No, I don’t know him, but my brother-in-law Franklyn finds him a good

neighbour. The parsons always hang together in the country, you know."

"Gerrard is staying with his uncle's family, Mr. Welby Spencer, and his sister is with them too—quite a large cheerful party—rather too large and too cheerful for our purpose, which is hard work."

Basil laughed. "I know Mr. Welby Spencer's family, I met them in Switzerland," said he. "Aunt Amelia ought to be president of a society for the promotion of amusement, and Blanche and Belle chief stewards—no, I am sure they are not conducive to hard work. Where are they lodging? I must call."

When Basil heard that his friends were no further off than the next house, he said he would go in at once with John; and he did go in *sans* formality, and was welcomed by the girls like a popular brother or cousin, with a shout of delight that Emmot heard through the open windows, and said was vulgar and ridiculous,—what noisy girls they were!

"Who would have thought of finding you here?"

but I believe you are everywhere!" cried aunt Amelia, rising rosy as a peony to shake hands. "You are just in time,—you must stay and help us; we are going to have a lot o' people in to-night, and such a beautiful charade and tableau, and we haven't known what to do for another man. Papa won't act—he is of no use at all. I am so glad to see you, and the girls are over-joyed, as you hear. We are in great luck, aren't we, papa?"

Blanche and Belle now had their turn, and the useless papa his, and Gerrard and Lexcey their introduction to the stranger, and everybody was perfectly at home and at ease with everybody else on the spot. John Seamer and his pupil were of course delayed from their duty; until, after a long twenty minutes' gossip and renewal of acquaintance, Belle, prompted by Lexcey, admonished them to go to lessons, adding of her own judgment, that *they* would take care of Mr. Godfrey, and keep him to luncheon and croquet or whatever else was to be the order of the afternoon.

Basil resigned himself to the douce captivity

into which he had fallen with perfect placidity and good-nature. If he had not met with friends, he would have gone leisurely forward to Whinmore, but a day or two more or less with the grouse was of no consequence, and he fancied that he wanted a little serious talk with his old tutor about his future plans. The fact was that he liked the revival, for a moment, of his free life that was past. He knew by the greeting of Aunt Amelia and her daughters that they were still unaware of his changed fortunes and prospects, and all the better he relished their enthusiastically cordial welcome. He had enjoyed some very pleasant, idle days with them at Lausanne a year ago—the girls knew how to be kind and favourable without being too serious. Like their mother, they seemed inclined to treat life as being, on the whole, a good joke.

When John Seamer and Gerrard were gone to the study, the ladies convoyed Basil up-stairs to their drawing-room, and as it was shady and cool on the balcony in front of the windows, out there he sat and was allowed a cigar, while Belle and

Blanche pretended to sew a little and talked much, and aunt Amelia begged him to tell her everything that had happened since they parted at Lausanne.

“When are you going to put off your knapsack and travelling shoes, and to give up living at inns?” she inquired as a woman whose friendliness gave her a personal right and interest in him which he would not gainsay.

“I am going back to Oxford,” replied he, whereat the girls exclaimed, and aunt Amelia testified disapproval and dismay.

“Then you will soon be as wise and slow as everybody else,” ejaculated she. “Who has been converting you—John Seamer?”

“No, not John Seamer. A lady—a very capricious lady, born blind.”

“I can’t think what you mean! I never could guess a riddle in my life. I shall quite give you up if you mean you are going to marry for money, and she won’t have you unless you are a clergyman! What does he mean, Blanche? Can you guess, Belle?”

Belle and Blanche shook their pretty sagacious heads, and declared they had not an idea; and Belle believed he would never marry anybody, but would be all his life uncertain, coy and hard to please:—or fickle, prone to rove and sip at every flower—which were, she said, precisely the same in their results. Then Blanche asked if he had added any more specimens to his museum of hearts since last year, and especially if his own had sustained any fracture—she hoped it had not, and heard with satisfaction that, to the best of his judgment, it was in whole and sound condition still, and likely to continue so,—unless she had missiles to break it with that he did not know of.

“It is perfectly safe for me,” rejoined Blanche. And the triangular flirtation went on until they tired of it, and Basil’s cigar being smoked out too, they lapsed into sensible talk—to wit, talk of their neighbours, of Folkestone affairs in general, and of the day’s projected amusements in particular. He had no idea of confessing his engagement to his sprightly companions, and never dreamed of mentioning Joan Abbott’s name.

Lexcey Spencer was within the room busy at the writing-table with home letters when the door behind her opened, and Emmot Torre appeared. "Are you alone?" said she.

"No—the others are only out on the balcony," replied Lexcey.

"With Mr. Godfrey?"

"Yes, he is there too—won't you come in? They are old acquaintance. Belle has something to consult you about for to-night—I heard her say so—something about your dresses in the charade."

"That is what I came for, but I won't stay now if she is engaged," said Emmot; but as she spoke she advanced further into the room, and the group on the balcony heard her voice.

"Cousin Gerrard's *innamorata*," whispered Belle confidentially to Basil, and putting aside the lace curtain that screened the window, she cried out, "Oh, Miss Torre, you are just the person we want—we have caught our knight to whom you must play lady. Nonsense, sir, you are to act—you *must* act!" (this to Basil very

imperatively, cutting short his attempted remonstrance). "We have tried Gerrard, but he is short, much too short, and Mr. Seamer is as impracticable as a lamp-post. I beg your pardon, cousin Lexcey."

"What for?" said Lexcey, without raising her eyes or checking her pen.

Basil Godfrey rose, offered his chair to Emmot, and stood leaning against the iron railing of the balcony with his back to the sea, looking at the rosebud cluster of girls, and the comely mother rose, Aunt Amelia, with a lazy sense of satisfaction. Being a favourite with women, he was fond of their society, and was apt to let them lead him almost as they pleased—if his pleasure were not in opposition to theirs, that is. And it rarely was, for he had the taste and discretion to make his friends only amongst women who were nice.

Emmot acknowledged his trifling courtesy with a smile that would have transported Gerrard Spencer into lovers' paradise, but which left him solidly rooted in the common earth. He knew her story, and as it all recurred to him he said

to himself that he did not like her—how different she was from his sweet and modest Joan Abbott! Emmot was intuitively and instantly aware of his dislike. Her bold eyes fell, her visage changed, and there was neither coquetry nor feigning in the deep flush of mortification and surprise with which she retreated in her advance to this man—the first who had ever denied her the tribute of flattery that can be conveyed in a kind, admiring look. He had, indeed, given her a repulse, and had, perhaps, intended to give it. His mental comparison betwixt Joan and her reflected itself in a grave, almost stern countenance set against Emmot's assumption of intimacy with himself. Her vanity suffered horribly for a moment, and then, though the pang did not pass, her histrionic faculty helped her to hide it, and to play her part very well and quietly through the debate on the charade dresses. And miserable as were her sensations, she took her leave at last reluctantly. She was fascinated by Basil Godfrey's cool, critical regard, far more than ever she had been by ardent, pleading, passionate words, gestures, glances. She

coveted to meet it again but had not the courage, and when he bowed to her with a high polite "Good morning," she only bowed without raising her eyes. And then she went in home, and watched from behind the curtain for his leaving the house next door.

She watched till past noon with book and work on her lap, resisting Elizabeth's invitation to join her in a walk on the beach, and parrying all Mrs. Seamer's inquiries as to why she did not go out, why she was so languid, why she sat in the glare of the window when it was much cooler and pleasanter in the shady corners of the room. About half-past twelve John Seamer returned from his morning's duties, asked where his sister was, heard that she had gone down to the shore, asked if Emmot would not go too, received a denial, and hurried off again to join the party issuing at the moment from Mr. Welby Spencer's door. They were coming out with considerable noise and bustle—Aunt Amelia, Belle, Blanche, Lexcey, Gerrard, and Mr. Godfrey. Emmot bent eyes * and ears to see and listen. Not one gave a glance

her way—not even Gerrard. And they passed out of sight.

Sick and vexed at heart, humiliated, disappointed, she relinquished her guard, and retreated to the seclusion of her bed-room at the back of the house, where she remained till Elizabeth came in from her walk.

“Gerrard Spencer was quite in the dumps and angry when he found you were not on the beach with me. I wish you would keep him in better temper, if possible,” announced she cheerfully.

Emmot made her no answer but an involuntary sigh. Elizabeth turned short round, and looked at her. Evidently she discerned something new, for she turned away again as quickly, and by-and-by said, in a careless, indifferent manner, “What a singularly fine person that Mr. Godfrey is! You knew him a little before to-day, did you not?” Emmot said “Yes;”—indeed it seemed to her that she had known him a long time.

She was easily confidential, and before they went downstairs to luncheon, Elizabeth had heard her history of the butterfly, had laughed at it as

semi-mythological, or, at least, as passing into the regions of legend, and had advised the relegation of the insect to the humblest recess in Emmot's trinket-box. And Emmot had said with a tragical air, "No, she preferred it to gold and gems—it was a relic of the poor days when she was still happy, and had some who still loved her." Elizabeth was wickedly amused, though she perceived that there was a kernel of real feeling under this husk of sham prickles. "Oh, you fool, you fool," thought she; "if your bit of earnest is to profit you, keep it clear of all that weedy rubbish of affected romance."

XXXVI.

MODERN AMUSEMENTS.

AUNT AMELIA and her girls were most ingenious getters-up of an entertainment that should combine every possibility of fun and frolic with the proprieties of genteel life ; and to ensure the difficult conjuncture against the criticism of the severer functionaries of society, it was never called " a party," but only " a lot o' people coming in." Amongst the " lot " they invariably contrived to have an even proportion of children and some quite little toddlers, whose use was always admitted before the evening was well begun.

Basil Godfrey dined with the Spencers that evening, and was, therefore, present to witness and help at the reception of the company, which came early and came quickly, as if it liked to

come. First, the Joneses, a large family of all sizes, from a roly-poly five to a fat fifty; then the Browns, young married folks, with a red-haired, red-cheeked dumpling, in profuse white muslin and blue sash; and the Dawsons, also young married folks, with two tall slim boys in black velvet, silk stockings, and point-lace collars. Next four young men, one a slight acquaintance in London, the other three *his* friends, all four acceptable sociables by the sea; then Mrs. Bertie Clitheroe, widow, and Alice and Mary, her accomplished daughters, several single ladies unattached, and odd men belonging to nobody in particular, always to be had at impromptu *omnium gatherums*, and, finally, the people from next door, Mr. and Mrs. Seamer, John, Elizabeth, and Emmot Torre—a good fifty in all, and not badly mixed.

The guests had fallen into groups, and were in full cry of conversation when the Seamers and Emmot appeared—Emmot more radiant in beauty than any—a striking figure that everybody watched and everybody inquired about. She met Basil Godfrey's eyes as she entered, and dropt her own

instantly—with no mock modest shyness, but with the reserve of a conscious weakness that she trembled to betray. Basil contemplated her from a distance with cool disfavour, as a man might contemplate a picture in which there was much of form and colour to admire, but a subtle something in the expression that surrounded it with an atmosphere of disenchantment. He did not advance to share her greetings, but remained standing by the centre-table, where the newest puzzles were displayed, and the latest numbers of the illustrated papers, and *Punch* and the day's *Times*, and a selection of those modern toys for the promotion of laughter which have displaced the more formal games of the elder generation.

“Have you seen the portrait of the gorilla, Mr. Godfrey?” said a solemnly sly little girl of eleven, and offered him a photographic case, which Basil innocently opened—to see his own adorable countenance reflected in a tiny mirror. All the circle laughed at the trick, though they had seen it played a score of times, and several candidates who had not, put in a plea that they too might see the

portrait of the strange beast—amongst them a single lady, rather deaf and very grand, who asked what was the noise about, and being told the portrait of the gorilla, said, Oh, she should like to see it, she had heard so much about it; but evidently did not take the joke when put upon herself, for she drew up stiffly, shut the case, and was grander than ever.

“Hush,” whispered Blanche, to stop a titter, and raising a miniature cauldron on a miniature kitchen-range to the level of Mr. John Seamer’s very serious nose, invited him to lift the lid, and when he politely obeyed, out leapt a miniature demon, black as a coal, and raised another scream and chorus of laughter.

While these innocent diversions were going on round the table, Aunt Amelia and Belle were circulating amongst the company, and suggesting a game with the children during the time the actors were preparing for the first scene of the charade, which was to be represented in the back drawing-room. Everybody was willing, and more than willing, to engage in “Post” or “Slappy,”

but Aunt Amelia had learnt a new game much funnier than either, and much better devised for rubbing out society-starch—a game quite as sportive, indeed, as *Lady's Toilet*, or *Hunt the Slipper* when played in the family of the Vicar of Wakefield.

A white sheet was brought in, chairs and tables were pushed to the wall, and the guests, small and great, except the few wanted for the opening scene of the charade, seated themselves on the floor, their feet converging under the outspread sheet, and the hem held breast-high by each person with the left hand, while the right was kept beneath to receive and pass on mysterious, unseen objects—to guess the nature of which was the purpose of the game. But the fun of it was in the playing, in the traits of character it elicited, in the various aspects of curiosity, surprise, horror, dismay, and vexation that came over the players in spite of themselves, as they waited for, touched, and passed forward the invisible articles. Belle Spencer introduced them into the room in her father's blue bag, and they were drawn forth and set circulating by

Aunt Amelia, who always put in her hand with a countenance intensely expressive of her doubts as to what she might lay hold of. The children enjoyed it gloriously, and the elders who had some of the child-humour left, but infinitely more comic were the faces of those dignified persons who felt themselves being made fools of, and who were ashamed of their position—the deaf lady, for instance, and John Seamer, who wanted to look his best in Lexcey's eyes, and knew he did not.

Lexcey was seated opposite to him, with Basil Godfrey on one side and Emmot Torre on the other, and beyond Emmot again was Gerrard Spencer. People had placed themselves very much at random, and not until the game began did the uninitiated discover how much nicer it would have been to sit by an intimate friend. Many of the ladies would have liked to shirk the necessity to touch the abominable thing which was cast, now with a shriek and now with a shudder, into their laps, and if their next neighbour had been husband or brother would have bidden him take it; but in most cases the neighbour was a

stranger or a new acquaintance, and propriety had to be observed in spite of nerves. A boot-jack, a bottle-brush, and a frantic kitten were sent round, without exciting any very violent attack, but presently Aunt Amelia howled as she put her hand into the bag, and flung down, with every appearance of disgust, what she had drawn out. Her neighbour had to grope for it, and as it was passed forward it produced every variety of horrible grimace that the human countenance is susceptible of.

“I shall never dare to touch it—shall you?” muttered Emmot to Lexcey as they saw it coming, and Lexcey leant over to her brother, and bade him fling it across them both to Mr. Godfrey.

But a protest was raised that this was not fair, and Gerrard, with a “yah!” of repulsion, dropt the thing upon Emmot’s knees. She tried to lift it, but at the instant of contact with her warm sensitive fingers, she shrieked out that it was a *dead hand!* and sprang up, letting fall the sheet, which other ladies let fall too, and the horror

was discovered to be a dogskin glove filled with wet sand—the touch of which Emmot had justly described.

This explosion brought the game to a close, and the tinkle of a bell announced the first scene of the charade ready. The company fell back in haste to the chairs, the impromptu curtain that closed the arch of the inner drawing-room was drawn aside, and two ragged Irishmen were revealed, driving two little pigs to market,—the said pigs being represented by very small girls on all-fours, whose hair was twisted up at the sides into the semblance of ears, and their sashes exchanged for very tight, curly tails. Each had a string to one hind leg, each had learnt a tiny melodious grunt, and each developed a natural turn for not going the road she was driven. The owners of the “porkers” kept up in the richest brogue a dialogue on the merits of their respective pets, until there entered to them an old Scotch-woman in black silk coal-scuttle, red cloak, short petticoats and pattens, anxious to make a bargain for one or both, and on the successful issue of an

animated chaffer the curtain dropt, and Aunt Amelia announced: "The first syllable!"

While the second scene was preparing, as most of the children were in request for it, an interlude of music ensued, and, on the rising of the curtain again, was continued as the accompaniment to a merry song, "We go a-maying," which the actors sung in chorus. The May-Queen was Emmot, crowned with a rosy garland, and her white dress looped about with gaudy natural flowers. All her court of lads and lasses were equally gay, and after singing a stanza in procession, they danced to another round a very beautifully contrived May-Pole. Aunt Amelia announced: "The second syllable!" and the curtain dropt with loud and sincere applause. The scene was very well put on the stage, said the amiable critics, and the May-Queen was a May-Queen indeed!

There was only talk, but plenty of that, until the curtain rose for the third time, and showed the mouth of a dismal den and the dining-room hearth-rug (a tiger-skin with the head stuffed for

a foot-stool and furnished with teeth and glass eyes) filling the cavity. Two hunters in very short coats and gaiters went about obtrusively on tip-toe with guns and Belle's terrier, whispering in fearsome tones, "The lion, the lion!" and with a horrible answering roar and bellow from the hearth-rug, down once more came the curtain.

"Third syllable!" cried Aunt Amelia, and added energetically, lest the spirits of the company should flag: "Now as they will be rather longer dressing for The Whole, let us have another game—let us play post, the children all know that. Papa, Mr. Seamer, you are not going to escape—come and play!"

Thus everybody was impressed, and the post went out with great celerity between Jericho and Timbuctoo taking Dresden by the way, and between Callao and Naseby, calling for letters at Owhyhee and Mount Blanc; and general posts occurred that turned the world completely topsy-turvy, and left the Canaries to starve at the North Pole, and the Isle of Dogs to go rabid at the Equator. The elders were tiring a little of

their swift, unceasing locomotion, when, for a relief, Belle looked in at the door, and with a face of anxiety beckoned out Mr. Baines. The artist had crossed from France by the same boat as Mr. Godfrey, and like him, had been persuaded to delay his journey to London for a day to please his good friend Mrs. Welby Spencer.

“Are you not ready?” inquired Aunt Amelia of her daughter.

“Not yet,” replied Belle, and disappeared with the artist.

Something had evidently gone wrong in dressing for the last scene. The curious looked round to see who were missing from the company, and discovered the absence of the lovely May-Queen, of Lexcey Spencer, her brother, Mr. Godfrey and the sly little girl who had shown him the portrait of the gorilla. Aunt Amelia begged to be excused for a minute, and left the room, and as nobody knew what could be amiss everybody had liberty of conjecture.

As the hostess whirled out upon the landing this was what she saw: Gerrard Spencer leaning

his back against the wall in a mood of thunder and lightning, and Basil Godfrey sitting on the stairs looking very beautiful, cool, and sarcastic in the supposed costume of a Greek sculptor. "The statue won't act," said he in an explanatory tone, and Aunt Amelia flashed by another door into the back drawing-room.

"Why won't Dulcie act?" cried she, seizing the little recreant sly girl by the shoulder. Dulcie made it understood that she did not choose to part with her stiff petticoats or to have her hair pulled down.

"Never mind, mamma, Miss Torre will take the part," interposed Belle, and Aunt Amelia, with a spasm of propriety, cast her eyes over a tall, slender, white-draped figure, against a background of red, with arms bare, hands crossed upon the bosom, feet unshod, and rippled golden hair flowing far below the waist.

Mr. Baines was arranging the folds of the drapery as if she were only a plaster model. "Bow your head a little more—now close your eyes—that will do perfectly," said he. "And

mind and wake *very* slowly, and at the final moment, when you see your lover, with an air of sweet surprise and tenderness. What do you think of this, Mrs. Spencer? She looks the statue as well as the May-Queen."

Aunt Amelia hardly knew what to think—she hoped privately that nobody would say it wasn't proper. "How has she made herself so white?" she asked aloud.

"Oh, that is nervousness," said Belle. "Pray don't faint, Miss Torre."

"No fear of that," responded the statue without stirring an eyelash.

"She'll do now," said Mr. Baines, and pushing Dulcie impatiently aside, Aunt Amelia called in Basil Godfrey.

Gerrard Spencer came too, and seemed about to open stormily when his cousin Belle took him by the arm and insisted on his being quiet. "Don't go and spoil everything, Gerrard," urged she with fervour. "It is all that stupid little Dulcie's fault. Come away into the drawing-room." She made him go; Aunt Amelia and

Mr. Baines immediately followed, and after the lapse of another minute or so, the curtain drew up from before the stage.

An exclamation of astonishment and delight greeted the *tableau*. It was charming! It was wonderful! How was that mysterious, pale lustre shed over the statue? Was it a statue? The illusion was magical! How beautiful she was! what arms, what magnificent hair! The Cyprian sculptor came into view: mazed, bewildered by the loveliness he had created, and bowed his face upon her feet, and wept for ecstasy. Then he rose and stood enraptured, and went to and fro looking upon her, his noble, perfect work! And then he burst into a passionate invocation to the Goddess of Love, entreating that the dead marble might breathe and live! The pale light took a rosy hue, the draperies gently stirred, and as the prayer increased in ardour, a thrill seemed to animate the figure slowly, the lips, the eyelids quivered, and suddenly, like a burst of sunshine, as they opened on the sculptor rising from his knees to clasp her, the soul of a woman kindled

in the face. The curtain fell on the pantomimic embrace, and the company went off like one voice into a polite enthusiasm of applause.

“The whole Word!” cried Aunt Amelia, glad and thankful that the charade had gone off without *fiasco*.

“Pygmalion,” said John Seamer, and a dozen people candidly declared that they were just going to say the same.

This remarkable unanimity was dissented from by the deaf lady. “I thought it was knighthood,” said she. “Miss Blanche certainly told us something about knighthood.”

“It was to put you on a false scent—there was nothing about knights or hoods in the acting,” replied the young lady unblushingly.

“But there was night—getting home before *night*—and n-i-g-h-t is quite as good spelling for *knight* as p-y-g is for *pig*.” The deaf lady was what the young folks called “an argumentative party,” but supper soon stopt her talk, and edified all the world much more agreeably. Aunt Amelia gave capital suppers.

Mr. Baines, who was good-natured and never liked to spoil sport, waited to see if Basil Godfrey would offer Emmot Torre his arm—no, he passed downstairs with Belle Spencer. Then he looked to see if the thunder-browed Gerrard would take her, but Gerrard was in a fit of sullenness, and pretended not to notice her. So that artist came forward himself, complimented her on her admirable representation of the statue, and conveyed her to the supper-room with great respect.

“Yes,” said she, in answer to his flattering remarks, “you told me once that I should shine on the stage. That is what I shall have to take to some day. I know that I am in part indebted to you for my present position, but I am not happy in it. It is very respectable, but it is also very dull.”

“I believe everybody’s life is more or less dull. They sicken of it at intervals—there grows to be a sameness even in change after awhile. But perhaps you are not happy in yourself?”

“I have no right to complain—I am as well off as I deserve to be—better, indeed,” and she sighed.

“Well, don’t do anything rash or in haste that

might for ever spoil your chances of a handsome settlement. You may play a good part on the real stage of life, without betaking yourself to the mimic stage," said the artist discreetly, and helped himself to lobster salad with his cold chicken and ham.

Basil Godfrey was on the opposite side of the table, between his lively friends Blanche and Belle, looking as gay as a lark, and as indifferent to serious things. Emmot's roving eyes often visited his face, but won never an answering glance at all. She had put on the tinsel butterfly, but he would not see it or her, and Gerrard Spencer, who was at a distance, but in a favourable post for observation, hated him for his fascination of the lady, and still more for his neglect of her.

The best-contented man in all the company was perhaps the grave and reverend John Seamer, who had Lexcey beside him, and Lexcey in a very conversable, propitious mood.

The evening ended with a dance after supper, and was pronounced by nearly all a success. "You know," said Aunt Amelia, "it was not like a party, it was only a lot o' people coming in."

XXXVII.

THE DISTRACTED LOVER.

It was past midnight and the moon was up when Basil Godfrey and Mr. Baines left Mr. Welby Spencer's house to return to their inn. "Pleasant, hospitable people, the Spencers," remarked the artist, striking a match to light his cigar. "Can't live without fun whether in town or country; always something going on at their house. Have you known them long?"

"Met them at Lausanne last year. How comes your fair Well-Dresser into that society?"

Mr. Baines explained. "The picture was seen by a person who recognized something familiar in her face, and after inquiry, sent his lawyer to do a tardy duty by her. She is placed with the Seamers as with natural guardians, to be instructed, taken care of, and settled for life."

“ And she is befooling young Spencer — the mischievous jade ! ”

“ Yes, but with his eyes open. He knows all her story, and the disaster of her former lovers.”

“ That will not save him from coming to grief, —she does not care for him.”

“ Not a chip ! When do you go on to town ? ”

“ To-morrow, and the day after to Whinmore. I shall re-enter at Oxford for the Michaelmas Term.”

“ Going to enter one of the professions to make yourself secure against all contingencies ? ”

“ I have not thought of that,” and Basil stopped short musingly. What contingencies did his friend refer to ?

“ Colonel Godfrey is not so old a man but that he might have a caprice to marry again, and cut you out of the succession,” suggested the artist, as if speaking of quite an event of course.

“ Bless my soul, *yes*. Would you believe that never occurred to me ? ” said Basil and laughed.

“ It is not very probable as you are on such excellent terms ; but it is just one of those awkward

possibilities against which a man that is wise provides."

This little colloquy gave Basil Godfrey something new to think about. After all, his future was not so perfectly assured as he had been allowing himself to suppose. He was certain that no idea of re-marriage had yet presented itself to his uncle's mind. Colonel Godfrey was too fond of his ease, of his desultory, untrammelled existence, lightly to encumber himself again with the forms and duties of English family life and squirearchy. But a change might come over him: some syren might entrap him during his somnolent Indian summer; or, if his nephew disappointed his reasonable expectations, he might revenge himself by contracting a second marriage to disappoint him.

Basil did not, however, suffer this contingency to press on his mind too much. He smoked a fresh cigar on it, and went to bed and slept none the worse. It did not appear very imminent, in fact, and on the morrow, with a heart quite at ease, he travelled up to town with Mr. Baines, and the

following morning went down into Yorkshire, and was received at Whinmore with a hearty welcome as the young squire. He felt it undeniably pleasant, and the artist's painful suggestion retired into greater remoteness than before. He would not believe that casualty could be written in his chapter of accidents. He was born fortunate, he counted on his luck, and after such an interlude of sanguine hope, *that* would verily be a misadventure and a downcome!

Basil Godfrey left a void at Folkestone greater than his most enthusiastic admirer could have thought, and much more real than he had any idea of himself. Emmot Torre was wonderfully smitten. The Clapham friends were astounded at the execution that had been done on her in so brief a space, and suspected her of affectation. It seemed to them that Mr. Godfrey had come and gone, a social meteor, beautiful but harmless; it seemed to Emmot that a seed of wild fancy unconsciously sown in her heart last May day by the Cross at Ashford, had lain dormant all this while, to spring up like a gourd into a full-grown passion

in a single night under the forcing heat of their second meeting. It was a dewless, unfragrant plant, however, and rooted in most arid, unpromising soil. She was very cross and disagreeable for several days after Basil's transit. All her thoughts, hopes, expectations were given to the how, when and where she might see him again. And yet, except that tinsel butterfly, she had nothing of his to hang her vagaries on. He had been just *not* discourteous to her, and that was all. Perhaps that very tinge of discourtesy had helped to pique her into love.

Elizabeth rallied her on the ridiculousness of her caprice, and Emmot answered her: "I tell you, if ever I marry, Basil Godfrey will be the man!" and she pretended to treat her self-assurances as a prophecy.

It was hard lines for Gerrard Spencer after this. Instead of smiling on him as heretofore, Emmot was angry, told him he wearied her, vexed her; that she had not patience with him, and never could, she was quite sure, make him any return for his troublesome devotion. Gerrard did

not take her repulses passively. He neglected his studies, lost his temper, and railed and raved to Lexcey by the hour against his enchantress's falseness; was one day for leaving the country, another for shooting himself, a third for strangling her. He cursed Basil Godfrey in his heart, and he cursed him aloud with his mouth, but Basil in the Yorkshire heather went scatheless of both flames—both passion and hate. He was charmed against them by sweet thoughts of his dear Joan.

Lexcey and John Seamer together, at length, prevailed on the infatuated young man to leave Folkestone, and get out of the way of the fatal Emmot. Catching him one morning in a mood of despair, his tutor carried him off to Oxford, and though term was not begun, he set him to work, and kept him as steadily at it as his brain would bear. And that was not very steadily. Disappointed passion and mortified vanity were proving almost too much for a mind never very manly to endure. He had fled from Emmot's presence, but by the sudden explosions of causeless laughter into which he often burst uncontrollably while seeming

to pore over his books, John knew that he was indulging in passionate day-dreams of her love with wits disturbed, and verging perhaps on dissolution. He wrote about her to Elizabeth Seamer, to his cousins, to anybody who could send him news of her. He wrote long, incoherent rhapsodies to herself, and longer still to Lexcey, with whom also John had a regular correspondence. Lexcey in her answers soothed him, appealed to his duty and affection for his father, and to his own ambition, once high vaulting enough. But his ambition was dead, and his filial duty and affection fallen into abeyance ; and the miserable young man was becoming aware that he had not his former mastery of himself, and that he frequently said and did things which excited a stare and expressions of surprise.

What havoc Basil Godfrey made amongst the grouse is not of present moment to this history, nor what intimacies he contracted amongst the neighbouring squires, the Whinmore tenants, and the electors of Standen ; but it may be taken for granted that he fell short of none of his duties in these

respects, and that he achieved considerable popularity before he went up to Oxford in October to re-enter at Christ Church. He had the cordial approval of all his friends and well-wishers on this step, and especially of sweet Joan Abbott, who told him merrily that she liked to hear of his coming down to her level and going to school.

On the morrow of his arrival Basil met Gerrard Spencer, and had the pleasure of inquiring after his lively entertainers at Folkestone. They were all well, said Gerrard, and were hoping that they should see Mr. Godfrey in town at Christmas. They had great designs afoot for private theatricals, and were, he believed, practising for them already. Basil, unaware of the delicate position of affairs, asked if they were to have Miss Torre's assistance, and Gerrard, with a lightning of rage in his eyes, said he supposed so, and rushed away without another word.

A week or so after this John Seamer, in speaking to Basil of his people at home, mentioned the enchantress.

“She has given Spencer his final congé, and it

is a relief—now there may be a chance of his getting through the examinations. Last month I was afraid there would be none. His mind seemed to be giving way between fits of despondency and exhilaration during the latter part of our stay at Folkestone. His sister was extremely anxious, and I was thankful to bring him off here safe. Mistress Emmot showed great severity to his passion when it was too late, but she cannot help trying to play the devil with men's senses for a little while. I wonder why such witches are created ? ”

“ For our trial and affliction,” said Basil, and laughed.

“ She will be bitten herself some day, and our wrongs will be vindicated,” said John, with a glance askance at his friend. But Basil seemed perfectly unconscious of any insinuation, and only answered that he hoped she would—she deserved it.

Gerrard Spencer's eccentricities continued and increased. Many things were against him at this crisis. A notable disappointment befel him in the case of a prize essay. He had made sure that he

should win, and had made no secret of his assurance. But the prize was awarded to a pale, weak-voiced young man, who wore spectacles and rarely spoke above his breath. The essay of the successful competitor was much talked of. Competent critics pronounced that the author had in him the germs of a great historian, and his name was a name of mark in their circles from that day forward. Some time after he rewrote the pamphlet and extended it to a volume, which took its place at once in the libraries of scholars as the best work that had been produced in any language on a difficult and much disputed period of history.

As for Gerrard Spencer's essay, it went only with the ruck, and was, indeed, but a poor performance. It contained some eloquent passages, but he had not laid hold of the gist of his subject, and when he heard the prize-man's essay, he knew that he had merited failure. That, however, did not console him; for, with the sense of failure deserved came the knowledge of want of power—that sort of power which labour does not attain to, which is the gift of God. Frightful doubts vexed his irritable

soul, complicated with shy suspicions that the whole University was laughing at him and his defeat. He could not endure raillery, and condolence he hated, and not being a man who had ever tempted friends to familiarity, he was left in his first access of wrath to sulk alone.

Perhaps nobody was really astonished at his break-down but himself. His large pretensions had gained him in some quarters the reputation of being able to do anything he liked ; but shrewd observers, his tutor amongst them, said of him, that though his abilities were great, and his capacity for work great, there was a danger that he might overreach himself in aiming too high, and getting a conspicuous fall might be too hurt in his sensitive vanity ever to wish to rise up again. This danger the rector of St. Giles's had always recognized in his son's character, and when the unfortunate news of his defeat reached Whorlstone anxiety for him was redoubled.

And the anxiety was even yet less than the peril. Gerrard grew negligent in his dress, went to chapel and lectures unshaven, unbrushed, and

one day plucked off his cap in the public street, and saluted two old dons who had not the honour of his acquaintance as noble Pythagoreans. He laughed aloud one Sunday afternoon at sermon in St. Mary's Church, and then plunged out, noisily cursing and swearing under his breath. He sent his compliments to the dean, and begged for a private interview, and when it was accorded he startled that great functionary by proclaiming that he had discovered all the affinities of Satan, who was shortly to appear on earth in his original angelic form as Son of the Morning, and to be the prophet of a new dispensation.

As a consequence of this the dean had some conversation with the young man's tutor, and the rector of St. Giles's was written to and advised to remove his son from the strain of the examinations and give him rest. It was a terrible blow to them all at home, but when Mr. Spencer reached Oxford he knew he had not come a day too soon. His son left with him, and after a very unhappy, distressful week together in London, it was judged expedient to place the distracted lover

under the care of a physician, who gave certain hopes that he would ultimately be restored to his right mind if secluded and put under proper treatment at once : otherwise he would not undertake to answer for his recovery at all. The unhappy father bowed to the opinion of authority, and leaving his eldest hope in a lunatic retreat, went back alone to his sorrow-stricken family.

XXXVIII.

A WOMAN'S AMBITION.

WHEN news of Gerrard Spencer's calamity reached Emmot Torre she burst into a flood of angry tears. "And do they blame me again?" cried she, detecting the reproach in Elizabeth's eyes, who told her. "I wish I were out of a world where I do nothing but mischief!"

From this it will be inferred that Emmot had her vexations, keen if not permanent. Ambition had taken hold upon her, and curiosity, and both were being severely exercised at this moment. She had set her heart on discovering the patron who paid her pension to the Seamers; she had convinced herself that he must be a man of wealth and quality, and that if she could persuade him to recognize her as a *niece* or a kinswoman in any

degree, she would take a better place in the world than she did at Clapham. She had made herself familiar with Mr. Basil Godfrey's circumstances and expectations, and without a notion of the difficulties in the way, but only a general idea that a beautiful and clever woman can accomplish whatever she wills, was bent on raising herself to a position where those cool, negligent eyes of his should be compelled to regard her, if at all, with respect. She meant to conquer Basil. This scheme absorbed her to the exclusion of all remorseful memories, and her tears for Gerrard were soon dried.

The Christmas gaieties went on at Aunt Amelia's just as if poor Gerrard had been there, and Emmot laughed and danced through them as brightly as if life knew no such thing as unhappy love. It happened that business brought Basil Godfrey to town once during the holidays, and that he met her at Aunt Amelia's Twelfth-Night party. She had the bitter sweet satisfaction of remembering when it was over that she had first caught sight of him that evening standing in a doorway,

and watching her without his former air of cold and critical disfavour. She smiled and blushed up in his face when the figure of the dance brought her near him, and they exchanged a greeting—just two words, and that was all. He paid her no attention whatever afterwards, did not ask her to dance, showed her no courtesy at supper, did not speak to her again, in fact; and yet she felt that she had been brought nearer to him, and that every time they might meet again it would be to draw nearer and nearer still.

This event, so insignificant in itself, was a new spur to Emmot's ambition. She astonished and fatigued Elizabeth by her late-awakened energy. No more was heard of hating work. She read, she listened, she drank in instruction and improvement at every pore. Mr. Baines dined at Clapham early in the spring. He had not seen Emmot since the previous August, and he did not dissemble his opinion that a clever woman is a wonderful product of nature.

“You cut your wisdom-teeth early to some

purpose," said he, familiarly. "I am ready to believe now that there is nothing you could not do if you gave your mind to it."

"There is one thing towards which I have not made a single step. You could help me if you would," replied Emmot.

"What is that?"

"To whom am I indebted for all this?" spreading out her hands, and glancing at her dress and gay environments.

The artist shrugged his shoulders and said, "Don't ask me!" and moved off with little deference. Emmot's queries were too direct to be parried, and were therefore, by wise men, to be run away from.

But her curiosity and ambition were not destined to be baulked. A fatality of success seems often to wait upon the strong-willed, and Satan to help those who do not seek God's help—which Emmot never did. She was an irreligious soul, and absolutely indifferent to things unseen. Philosophers of all ages and all creeds have consoled the unlucky by preaching on the little

value the Deity seems to set on the gifts of fortune from the worthlessness of the persons on whom he bestows them. Emmot Torre was a case in point. Her poor laborious aunt, her old companions at Ashleigh saw her, as they believed, rising from honour to honour, from prosperity to prosperity, flourishing like a may-bush, like a tulip-tree—and happy of course. But it is very doubtful whether Emmot ever was happy. She did not know contentment, and every step she achieved opened to her another step to be taken before she could think of rest. But she certainly had much success, and if she was never satisfied, she only shared the fate of all the selfish, self-centred beings in the world. She would have been happier if she had only had heart enough to suffer more; but pain with her always turned to rage and black mortification.

Mr. Baines had ungraciously refused her his assistance in discovering her patron, but it was through him indirectly that she, at last, won her way. His picture of "The Well-Dressers" was in the exhibition of the Royal Academy this year,

and one of the most admired and popular pictures on the walls. Little had Emmot once thought to behold it there, but having read a very flattering notice of it in *The Times*, nothing would satisfy her until Elizabeth consented to go into town one morning early, for the sole purpose of seeing it.

It was not so trying now to escort Emmot to public places as it had been at her first coming to Clapham. She had learnt not to turn her head abruptly in the street, not to flash her eyes about or to talk loudly. She had attention enough without trying to attract it, and had quite dropt her prankish airs since she had found that they were considered vulgar. Her dress was always good, but it was the last thing about her to be noticed. She was generally taken by strangers to be a young lady of distinction—figure, face, gait, were all of the higher *caste*. Elizabeth looked an eccentric gentlewoman in charge of her, and felt the character to the core.

From the catalogue Emmot discovered that “The Well-Dressers” was in the south-room, and Elizabeth, willing to have her curiosity promptly

appeased, led her off to it direct. The exhibition was yet new, and the connoisseurs and fashionables were there in great force. The two almost ran against Mr. Baines in the press near his own picture, and Emmot, nodding and smiling with good-humoured intelligence, said : “ We have come to see it.”

The artist was visibly startled and confused, and Emmot's quick comprehension took in the reason why on the instant. He was enacting cicerone to a big, burly gentleman with his head very high in the air, and a lady as burly but shorter, and in the gorgeous raiment affected by ladies who have lived much in tropical climes, and in whose veins runs tropical blood. “ It is a little further this way—you have passed it,” said Mr. Baines, and in the solid movement of a wedge of people, he contrived to detach himself from both parties, and to drift away out of sight and reach in the crowd. Emmot laughed to herself at his evasion, and looked up at the big stranger to find him looking down with apoplectic countenance on her. Immediately her eyes fell

as if quite inobservant, and she made her way towards the picture, perfectly sure that she would be watched and perhaps followed.

She was watched and she was followed. When she turned from her proud, pleased contemplation of her fancy portrait, she saw the gentleman and his lady seated on one of the red benches opposite to it, waiting apparently for the chance of the press in front diminishing. There was room on the bench for another person, and Emmot quietly took it, saying that she felt tired, and did not care for looking at any more pictures just then. Elizabeth replied that she did, and if Emmot would wait for her till she came back, she would go and see what there was more of her favourite artists' work to admire. Emmot sweetly consented, and there she stayed silent, subdued, very thoughtful for a long half hour, and then she had a change.

Elizabeth had told her that there was no place like the Royal Academy in May for meeting friends, acquaintances and country cousins, and the event proved her correct. First she saw Aunt

Amelia, who came to her jubilant, with catalogue rolled up as done with, and announced in a loud whisper : “ That’s over—I’m so glad ;” but was recalled to her duty, and carried off by Belle and Blanche as having the sculpture yet to *do*. Then Mr. and Mrs. Dale and Mr. Franklyn passed without recognising her, and Lady Emily Gisborne and her son. And presently Mr. Basil Godfrey, who was spending the Easter vacation in town with his uncle, appeared in view, and stopped at “ The Well-Dressers ;” Colonel Godfrey, who was with him, stopping too.

Emmot wore no veil, and her countenance was treacherous. She knew that when Basil Godfrey moved on, he must almost brush her skirts. Should she see him ? Would his look at her be one of recognition claiming acknowledgment ? Colonel Godfrey moved first, and immediately he turned from the picture his glance fell on the stout gentleman sitting on the bench with herself. He came forward with a cordial greeting : “ Ah, Vyvian, my friend, what a pleasure to see you after all these years, and how well you look ! ”

and the two shook hands for a couple of minutes. Then up came Basil, and was introduced to his uncle's companion-in-arms, General Sir John Vyvian, and a few low-spoken sentences referring to Colonel Godfrey's lost sons explained Basil's position.

"And this is madam, my wife," said the General introducing the lady in rich raiment. She lifted a pair of languid dark Indian eyes, bowed sleepily and was dumb.

At this moment Basil and Emmot became conscious of each other, and exchanged a formal inclination of the head. General Vyvian glanced sharply at them both, and presently, when they had all left her neighbourhood together, he inquired aside of Basil who the young lady was. Basil said her name was Emmot Torre—she was under the guardianship of the family of his Oxford tutor.

"She is a great beauty—you have met her occasionally in society?" said the General.

Basil said he had met her occasionally, and that she was no doubt extremely handsome, but his

tone did not imply enthusiastic admiration. General Vyvian asked him no more questions, but went about to watch Emmot from a distance. He called his wife's attention to her as a specimen of English loveliness, and when the drowsy eyes had scanned her for a moment or two, the inert lips moved and emitted a sound of approval.

The same evening in the connubial privacy of their curtains General Vyvian startled his wife by a certain communication concerning Emmot, and followed it up by a certain proposal. "You want a companion to amuse you—you tell me you are lonely here; will you have *her* for a companion? Will you make her a home? We have no children to be defrauded by care of her. What do you say?"

"I think it would be very nice," replied the tranquil spouse, and fell asleep. If her husband had offered her an angel from heaven or a demon from the pit as companion, she would have been equally obliging and acquiescent.

The following morning the dry chip of a lawyer, who was in the habit of paying Emmot's pension,

was ushered into the library where she sat at her lessons with Elizabeth. "I know what you have come for," said she in reply to his salutation, which betrayed an infusion of respect such as had not formerly been shown her by him.

"In that case," said he, "I am saved a troublesome explanation, and perhaps you will oblige me by at once putting on your bonnet and shawl, and coming with me to pay a visit to—you know whom."

"Yes, I know, but tell me a little more. I have no secrets from Elizabeth."

"A lady of great fortune wants a young companion—personable, amiable, amusing—and her husband, General Sir John Vyvian, is anxious to give her cheerful society. He has recognized the likeness of a deceased friend in you, and before looking further abroad for a companion for his wife, he is anxious to offer that post in his family to you. They have no children, and you may, if you choose, enjoy the privileges of a daughter of the house—though without the name of one."

“Thank General Vyvian, and tell him from me that if I have the substance I must have the shadow too. I am not one of those who ask, ‘What’s in a name?’ I think there’s much in a name. I’m sure I should smell sweeter by the name of Emmot Vyvian in his house than by the name of Emmot Torre.” Her art and promptness took her hearers by surprise. Elizabeth opened her eyes wide, the lawyer stood up on his feet.

“Is that all?” inquired he.

“That is all I have to say at present,” responded Emmot with serene dignity; but when the door closed on the envoy *that* vanished, and she hugged Elizabeth, she laughed, she sang, she danced in her triumph. “You shall see me one of the Queens of Society yet, and so shall *he*, so shall *he*!” was her chant, the emphasis plainly marking to Elizabeth what *he* she meant.

A day elapsed, two days, a week, a month, and there came no renewal of the offer to Emmot. She began to feel that she had been rash, to distrust her policy of pride. Midsummer was here, was over; London was growing thin; the

Seamers were beginning to consider where it would be best to spend the hot harvest weeks, and what John would like. Emmot did not keep her repentance to herself—she tired Elizabeth with speculations, hopes, doubts, fears. Ten times a-day she asked her what she would do in her place, and Elizabeth as often replied that she would do nothing, or she did not know what she would do.

Emmot's golden visions had quite lost their lustre, when General Vyvian's ambassador again presented himself at Clapham. He came to pay her quarter's pension to Mrs. Seamer and her private allowance to herself, and he made no allusion to his last visit until he was on the point of going away, when he turned abruptly, as if at a sudden after-thought, and said: "When you feel of a mind to accept a good offer without making impracticable conditions you can let me know."

Pride and self-interest struggled together for a moment in Emmot's mind, and self-interest won. "I am ready to accept it; blood is thicker than

water," said she with a touch of sentiment. The lawyer laughed, and replied that he had felt sure she would think better of it, if she had time given her ; and with that, he went his way.

XXXIX.

ANOTHER STEP UP THE LADDER.

WITHIN a week from this date Emmot Torre found herself domiciled in a mansion in Gower Street—close, hot, smelling like an Indian cabinet. Purposely or not, General Vyvian was absent when she arrived, and she had the evening to make herself at home with his wife—a human dormouse, who was only happy so long as she was allowed to have the windows closed, and was suffered to eat and sleep her fill. Emmot had the length of her foot (or believed she had) before their tête-à-tête dinner was over. She did not know how much craft and subtlety a somnolent habit can hide, and she felt a supreme English scorn for the fat lady whose pale olive skin and dusky, drowsy eyes betrayed her mixed Indian blood. And at the

same time the Indian lady was taking *her* measure; was discovering that there was about her none of the pliancy, adaptability, servility, of a humble companion, but all the selfishness, exaction, and self-admiration of a proud and petted beauty, who would not readily yield the first place to any rival. Another thing she discovered too—that Emmot was General Vyvian's own child, not in fact only, but in feature, in air, temper, character, and that she knew it. Emmot, indeed, made her knowledge amusingly evident. A beautifully painted miniature of the General as a young, quite beardless man, was one ornament of the drawing-room chimney-piece. She took it down, regarded it for ever so long with studious attention, then put it up against her own face, and regarded them both side by side in the mirror. Lady Vyvian observed her action, but said nothing—would not be provoked to say anything when Emmot repeated the experiment a second and a third time. She only thought she had not been bred a lady, and then she put her head down on the sofa cushions and fell fast asleep.

Emmot thereupon gave herself up to the uncontrolled study of other inanimate objects about her. When the Clapham drawing-room was new to her, she had thought *that* a palace of luxury, but this was costlier, richer, more splendid by far. Only the sumptuous phraseology of the pink romances, glittering in purple and scarlet, in gold and gems, could adequately describe it. She had not a name for half the things she saw—for the carvings in ivory, in ebony, in sandal wood, for the filagree work in gold and silver, for the hideous jewelled images in precious metals, and the quaint pieces of furniture inlaid of various woods. The carpets, mats, curtains, covers were all the finest wrought product of Eastern looms, and the grey film that was tarnishing their splendour was the not less finely wrought product of London smoke. Emmot would have given much for a breath of fresh air on Ashleigh Hill, or even for a breath of Clapham Common, in the sultry July evening made more sultry and oppressive by the rich Indian odours exhaled through the mansion; but she had only to sit and wait and wish for something to happen,

and finally to go to bed without anything having happened.

The chamber that had been assigned to her was as rich in its way as the drawing-room, and she adopted its elegant appointments as if she had been born to them. Lady Vyvian's English maid (she had an Indian ayah besides, who was her favourite) had given Emmot her attendance at dressing for dinner, and she now re-appeared and applied herself at once to her extra duties. As Emmot had never yet enjoyed the services of a personal attendant, she did not know all she had to submit to. But she learnt in a surprisingly short space of time, and even came to wonder soon how she could ever have lived and dressed herself without one.

The first thought in Emmot's mind when she woke in the morning was given to the heat of the weather ; her second to the chance or not of her having to meet General Vyvian at breakfast. His firm stand against her attempt at making conditions with him had taught her caution and prudence, and his absence last night had instructed

her in the necessity of reserve, and of never advancing an inch that he did not invite her to advance.

She had conceived a rôle for herself, and a rule of conduct very different from this, but she had not been born an actress for nothing, and she changed her plans completely in the course of her toilette ; from which she came forth freshly attired in her newest muslin, and with hair dressed in a new style, more modish than that of Clapham, but not so modestly becoming. It turned out that General Vyvian breakfasted alone, and that Lady Vyvian never left her couch until the day was well warmed ; and Emmot was conducted by the maid to a little back-room looking into a glass shed, so full of birds and flowers that it might have been an aviary. And there an elegant breakfast was laid for one person—herself.

“ Her ladyship bade me tell you, miss, that it was her wish you should consider this room as your own,” said the servant, and retired.

Emmot flushed up angrily, taking this for an intimation that she was to stay there, and not

circulate freely about the house. "But, indeed," thought she to herself, as she poured out a cup of fragrant tea, "I shall not be kept prisoner in this stifling little den! What a noise! What a smell!" and she cast a disgustful glance over her shoulder at the birds which were singing with all the force and vigour of their little throats.

She had made an end of her breakfast, and was wondering what next? when the door opened and General Vyvian walked in. He had been a fine-looking gentleman in his day, but his day was past, and he was now a very stout, red-faced personage, with an air of hauteur and command, qualified at this moment by some curiosity and more perplexity. Emmot rose as he entered, and made him her best curtsy, meeting his eyes without blush or tremor. He came forward and took her hand, but the emotion that thrilled his strong frame as he held it, did not communicate itself to her. She was too much her own mistress to feel the sentiment of the occasion.

"You are not in the least like poor Bessie," said he, and stood gazing at her and she at him

for a full minute. They were singularly alike in countenance, and both were aware of it. "You are a Vyvian—'tis of no use denying it," he added, as if not displeased at the discovery. "You are the very copy of my sister, who died at your age. Well! Have you nothing to say to me?"

"What should I have to say, sir? I am here as companion to your wife — a poor relation, dependent on your bounty," responded Emmot meekly as a meek-minded heroine.

"Very good—be it so. Behave well in that capacity, and you may mount higher. Keep in favour with my lady, and you will have nothing to wish for. She has a generous heart for a friend," said the General. His prompt acquiescence in her humility was very disappointing to Emmot. He became easy, cheerful, kind; his air of perplexity fell off, he laid a hand on her shoulder. "You are a very clever young woman, and we shall have no difficulty in understanding each other. You know the world is full of secrets, which everybody knows and nobody talks about—least of all those involved in them.

That is our sort of secret—now good-morning. The library is the adjoining room to this—you will find there papers and books to amuse you until Lady Vyvian is ready for her early drive.” He shook her hand, which he had never relinquished during the interview, and marched away quite oblivious of the mortification he left behind him.

Was that to be all! No floods of tears, no rapturous embracings, no effusion of remorse, of love, of agony! Only—There’s the library next door, and books and papers to amuse yourself till my lady calls for her coach and humble companion. Oh, the lying pink romances! What a climax for such a meeting. He to his club, and she to her novel, but to do her justice she did not read much of it. She was beginning to know that terrible vacuum of the heart which comes in the absence of human tenderness, and from the pain of which those whose lives are acted instead of lived cannot at all times escape.

XL.

“A YOUNG LADY OF OUR FAMILY.”

IF the seeds of enduring happiness are within us, so we may be sure are the seeds of perennial vexation, and Emmot, for some time after achieving the first step of her great ambition, reaped an almost daily crop. Clapham had been dull, but Gower Street at the end of July was infinitely duller, and Lady Vyvian much less sprightly company than Elizabeth. Her days were monotonously alike. At noon she left her chamber, and drove for an hour in brougham or barouche, according as the day was rainy or fair. Emmot occupied the seat by her, and was not required to talk—she could nurse the lap-dog, if she liked the amusement, in hot weather. Then there was tiffen, and after tiffen retirement for my

lady until five, when she had a second drive in the park.

This was the best bit of the day to Emmot. There was not much company left in town, but there was enough to show her the style and fashion of the great. She used to think which of the grand equipages she would like to call her own if she might choose. Occasionally the General, crimson and stertorous, rode by his wife's carriage for ten minutes, and exchanged a few sentences with Emmot, who filled her place in it very effectively. But they had little of his society at other seasons. The chief part of his day he spent at his club, and did not dine at home once a week. The two ladies dined alone at half-past seven, and Lady Vyvian afterwards slept till tea. Emmot reckoned that she was not awake more than five hours in the twenty-four.

Thus her step up the ladder of promotion had not yet, at all events, opened to her larger prospects. In vain she looked, in vain she longed for that brilliant society where she imagined

Mr. Basil Godfrey shining. She had nobody to talk to about him now. Oh, for Elizabeth's patient ears! She saw nobody, she went nowhere. In Lady Vyvian's world there was no opera, no theatre, no concert, no ball, no private party. She neither received visits nor paid any. She exchanged cards with her nominal friends periodically, and considered she had done all the social duty required of her.

General Vyvian had married his wife with an immense fortune, and he could do no less than let her go her way when she was willing to let him go his in perfect peace. He was much pleased with her at present for allowing him to bring Emmot home, and was also much pleased with himself for that virtuous action. He did not imagine that the girl could be discontented, or anything but grateful. He judged her by conventional rules instead of looking into his own heart, which would have been a much truer guide; the tame, void existence that suited his conjugal dormouse was never likely to satisfy the soul of a Vyvian. Indeed, Emmot wrote to Elizabeth, in despair

and defective orthography, that her life was maddeningly stupid—that she would rather be drawing water again on Ashleigh Green, or driving Teddy about the Surrey lanes, than vegetating where she was. But if the alternative had been put before her seriously, she would as certainly have turned from it and hugged her chains.

The said chains were very richly gilded. She loved fine clothes, and she had her desire of them; she loved ornaments, and might have decked herself like a barbaric princess. Lady Vyvian noticed her tinsel butterfly, and gave her a lapful of jewels that she was tired of; but Emmot treasured the brass trinket sentimentally, and would not part with it, though she by no means made light of her new acquisitions.

By the first week in August the gay world had almost vanished from town, and General Vyvian told his wife one evening that there was nobody at the club. She suggested that they ought to do as others did, and go somewhere. The somewhere was decided by an accidental meeting with Colonel Godfrey travelling from Whinmore to

Paris in company with his nephew. As they were to rest a night in London they accepted General Vyvian's impromptu invitation to dine at his house, and the event for which Emmot had been eating her heart out came to pass. She met Basil Godfrey where she felt on level ground with him.

Notice of guests to dinner was sent to the housekeeper in Gower Street by three o'clock, and Lady Vyvian with resignation and Emmot with ecstasy made festive toilette for the occasion. Emmot had fallen into almost confidential terms with her maid, and when she went to her room to dress she told her: "Now, Benson, I must look beautiful to-night—my *very beautifullest*."

"I don't know, miss, how you could look otherwise," replied the servant. "It's a credit to have the dressing of such a fine young lady, as Madame Chapeline says."

Emmot began to hum a song, and hummed and trilled all through the process of plaiting her hair, and crowning her with it as with a glory, in front of the mirror. Then she threw off her white wrapper, and stood up in her slip unadorned,

admiring herself with the most candid admiration.

"Benson, it must be awfully trying to be an ugly woman. It puts me in good-humour only to see myself. I'm never a fright."

"Never, miss. I always think you're at your best in whatever thing you have on at the moment. That's the beauty of you:—you become dress, but you don't depend upon it like so many ladies."

Emmot hummed and trilled and watched the lacing of her embroidered crape robe, and exulted in her youth and strength, her lovely lilies and roses. She put on her ornaments, and adorned herself in her costliest apparel, and finally proceeded, as a finish to all, to stick the brass butterfly in the puffings of softness over her bosom. Benson stared and ventured on a remonstrance: "Do you think that trinket goes well with the pearls, miss?"

"No, it does not go well with anything, but I have a kindness for it, and I mean to wear it. So—it does not show very much, but anybody who likes can see it's there."

"Her ladyship will see it, miss. She's never

so sleepy but she can tell what everybody wears."

"Hum, hum, trill, trilla-la!" sang Emmot.
"And I don't care for her ladyship!" concluded she.

General Vyvian was with his wife in the drawing-room when the enchantress came down adorned to conquer. He bowed to her with a ceremonious, half sarcastic, half confused air, took her hand, and said in a significant tone, with an inclination towards the couch where his wife reposed: "A young lady of our family, Mira?"

"As you please, general, 'tis all the same to me," responded the Indian dormouse.

Emmot was perplexed, and looked none the less charming for it, glancing inquisitively from the one to the other.

"That is to be your style and title, Emmot—
'A young lady of our family'—Miss Vyvian," said the General, and she blazed out in her triumph, glad beyond measure to cast off her old name, and all that hung by it.

"It is better," cried she, "I am sure it is better since I carry your mark on my face!"

Lady Vyvian shot out at her a subtle glance from under her drowsy eyelids, and the General dropt her hand, and turned to the window. Nothing of the sympathy of the paternal and filial relation had developed itself between them yet, or he would have bidden her not use such plain terms in speaking to him. She had not a very delicate tact, 'tis sure.

The first guest to arrive was a brilliant widowed lady, invited to balance the party, a former acquaintance of the two military gentlemen in India. Lady Vyvian always liked to have her at little dinners, because she talked for her hostess or for anybody else who was dumb. To her the “young lady of our family” was formally presented, and the lively widow, curtseying down to the floor, did not doubt the fact at all. Colonel Godfrey followed in five minutes, with his nephew, and the ceremonial was repeated with no visible effect on either. Basil's countenance was absolutely imperturbable, and when he bowed low before Emmot, it was with the air of a gentleman making a perfectly new and perfectly agreeable

acquaintance. She was assigned him to lead to dinner, and he entered on the duty of conversation with the easiest, pleasantest conventionality in the world. Courtesy requires a man to say his little nothings to a lady, and to hear those said to him again with an appearance of deferential interest. Basil had that manner in perfection, and Emmot, silly country moth, thought she was fascinating, subduing, the *farouche* Adonis. Twice or thrice he failed to hear her speak, and twice or thrice he answered her at cross-purposes ; but how should she know that it was because of a mind absent with sweet Joan Abbott, from whom he had received a letter which he had only just had time to read before he came out to dine in Gower Street ?

They talked of the year's pictures, of the park, of the shops, like people meeting for the first time, and Emmot did not like the tacit negation of their previous acquaintance. She introduced the name of Folkestone into their conversation, and as he would evidently follow her lead, though he would not move first, she mentioned the Seamers ; but

unadvisedly and indiscreetly allowed herself in some adverse criticisms of Blanche and Belle. “They are not so *very* pretty, do you think they are? And their manners are quite boisterous and rough. Their cousin Lexcey who is engaged to John Seamer is more of the lady—so I fancy, though perhaps my opinion does not stand for much.”

“I should not object to them for sisters. I always liked their round, honest faces,” said Basil.

“You were very good friends—I saw that.”

“I am always friends with nice women; I don’t know that I ever fell out with one.”

“I hope you will not begin with me,” said Emmot airily.

Basil was accepting the butler’s proffer of champagne, and made no answer—did not seem to hear. Emmot resumed. “You have heard of Mr. John Seamer’s engagement to Lexcey Spencer?”

“Yes, and I believe the marriage is to come off next month;—very well-yoked pair they will be.”

“Terribly sad for his family, was it not, when that poor young Mr. Gerrard Spencer went out of his mind?”

“You know he is at home again? No! He is quite recovered, and permanently recovered they trust; but he is not going to take orders, he is to help his father in the school. Of course, it is a grievous thing for them all.”

“You do not lay it to *my* charge, Mr. Godfrey? that would be cruelly unjust,” whispered Emmot pleadingly.

“Oh, no—a man is himself to blame who runs mad for a woman that does not care for him.”

There was a tone in the last words that operated as a check on Emmot. She did not feel so sure as before of the speaker's approval, and she waited for him to renew the conversation. He was in no haste to do it, and her fingers toyed a little nervously with the brass butterfly, but without effect. He did not see—or if he saw—would not heed the honour done to his gift, and soon after the ladies rose and left the table.

It was then that Colonel Godfrey mentioned his

plan of going forward from Paris, in about a fortnight's time, to the German Baths. Whereupon quoth General Vyvian: "The very place for us too! There is always plenty of company, and the German beds will please madam, my wife."

The guests did not ascend to the drawing-room. Coffee was brought to them where they were, and they took leave early. The Colonel was under a regimen, he said, and was always obedient to the doctors. Then the General went upstairs to the ladies, and stood in the centre of the rug musing and meditating as he observed them.

"By Jove, what luck is some men's!" he burst out suddenly at a thought of Basil Godfrey, whose adventures he had heard over their wine. A couple of years ago that young fellow lived by his wits, and had not a prospect beyond them in the world. Now his uncle makes him an allowance of eight hundred pounds a year with free quarters at Whinmore whenever he pleases, and he is heir to as fine a fortune as any eldest son in England. The General's eyes were on Emmot as he made

these exclamations, and mildly raising her eyes, she inquired of whom he spoke.

“Of Mr. Godfrey,” replied he, and turning to his wife added: “Mira, we’ll go to Paris and the German Baths this autumn—you will like Germany. And we shall meet my old friend the Colonel there, and his buck of a nephew.”

Mira consented on condition that the General would make all the arrangements, and let her have no trouble. Certainly he would, and their old courier Fritz should accompany them and manage everything.

Words would but faintly express Emmot’s exultation in this glorious prospect of changes. Paris, where she would catch French polish! The German Baths where Basil would be! She counted without her host *there*—the General had said so, but Basil had quite another haven in view. No matter! She lived on the hope for ever so long, and did not die of its failure. Her heart was of the robust sort, and would take a great deal of breaking—tho’ Sythe Wardlaw’s prediction might possibly come true in the end.

XLI.

IN A GARDEN OF EDEN.

MR. BASIL GODFREY'S destination was Geneva, where his dear Joan was, and her friends. They had spent the last autumn at Frankfort, and the winter in Rome, and were now come into Switzerland for the summer. He put on his knapsack and seven-leagued boots, and was with them three days after leaving England. Had not Joan a welcome for him—a welcome of the warmest! A whole year had gone, and they were just the same;—he the gay student out for a holiday, she the sunny-eyed, simple maiden that loved him with all her heart. Their letters had been frequent and they had been long—so frequent and long that each knew all that the other had done, enjoyed, thought, suffered. The last was

not much. It had been a very serene year for both ; a quiet passage and probation time that they looked beyond with a sure and certain hope of union and happiness to come. Nothing had intervened to raise a cloud in the future since they parted last.

Their travels had agreed with Mr. and Mrs. Paget ; they were charmingly lodged on the bank of the beautiful lake, and were cheerful and strong. Joan had been a vast stay and comfort to them, they told her lover ; she was a good girl, and deserved all that had been done for her, " And she will not misbecome her promotion, sir," added the old lady when they were in private. " She is a gentlewoman every inch of her, and has a fine mind."

Basil was as perfectly aware of that as anybody. " She is a darling," responded he with enthusiasm. " She is dearer to me than all my other prospects put together ! "

Mrs. Paget inquired if he had achieved a good understanding with Colonel Godfrey about his engagement. Basil said he had not ; since his presentation of Joan to his kinsman by means of her portrait, when he had been rebuffed, the

matter had never been once named between them. Joan's godmother looked uneasy. She had hoped for news of peace and conciliation. Perhaps Joan had too, but if so, she kept her disappointment to herself. She had some natural reticence, and a thought settled in her mind secretly that she must never marry Basil to his injury. Basil remembered all his uncle had said on the former occasion, and as there was no immediate need of his favourable countenance, he judiciously avoided provoking a repetition of it. But Colonel Godfrey knew quite well whom he had gone to meet at Geneva. There was nothing clandestine about the affair.

Basil told Joan that he meant to pass all that was left of the long vacation in Switzerland, and only to return to England in time to reach Oxford for the beginning of the Michaelmas term. One year more of study, and he would have his degree, and the world before him ! He spoke with exultant, eager temper, and Joan's reply fell like a drop of cold water on metal hissing hot. " And then your real work, trials, temptations will begin—the hard, long fight before the triumph." There

was *that thought* in her mind, and the words came out with a sigh.

“Joan, thou hast one fault!” cried Basil.
“Thou art too philosophical! That comes of overmuch books, and only elder companions. Thou wouldst admirably console a defeated man!”

“You will not be that, Basil,” said she, looking at him with lovely wistful eyes.

“No, God forbid! It is enthusiasm with ambition that wins.”

“Ambition? ah! that Juggernaut! What sacrifices it demands, what hearts it crushes to death! But I knew you were ambitious—and I know you will succeed,” and she smiled in his face as if mocking at her own seriousness.

“It is thy confidence will cheer me on, Joan: I repent; thou art not a bit too philosophical! Why do people ever predict mischiefs when predictions in earnest almost always fulfil themselves? Yours shall stand to me for true, and hold me up if I am ever like to fail!” With that they fell silent for a time.

They were alone together in the garden of the

little house which Mr. Paget had hired for the summer. They looked towards the mountains flushed with sunset, and the still lake. It was very lovely, Joan said, but not lovelier, she thought, than the view on a fine evening from the cattle-bridge at home. The greenness of home was its charm that bluest skies of Italy or France could not match for her. "I shall have a memory full of pictures—what we see, young and happy, we don't forget; but oh, Basil, let us live in England!" He said, of course they should; he enjoyed a spurt of foreign travel, but his affections were always at home. Joan had brought out her basket of needlework to be industrious while Basil talked; she could not afford him the many hours he claimed quite idle, and he graciously submitted to divide her attention with a piece of muslin.

"Thou art the best of good company, sweetheart, whether button-holing and embroidering or not," he told her, and watched the swift deft fingers ply their needle-craft with much interest. They were very pretty fingers too—very shapely

hands, and quite fair enough for youth and health.

Their seat was only the low stump of a cut-down tree, with another tree thick of leaf overshadowing it. Her basket was on the grass at her feet; a crimson book, a bundle of papers were half-hidden, half-revealed amongst the white work under the quilted blue silk cover. Basil espied the corner of the book, recognized it, stooped to take it out, and took out the papers too. "What are these—exercises?" inquired he. "Latin, Greek, German, Italian, French."

"I won't be quizzed, sir; they are none of those," said Joan, and put her hand out to take the roll from him.

He held it up out of her reach. "Is it secrets?—Ah, Joan, have you secrets from me?"

"It is a diary, Basil. I used to keep it for myself at home; I keep it now for my mother, and send her long chapters when I have opportunity. You shall carry that to England when you go, if you will."

He restored it to the basket, but kept his eyes

upon it, saying presently: "Joan, you don't know what a desire I have to read that document. Your father reads it?"

"Yes, he reads it to my mother, and tells my news from it to the neighbours. Cousin Nicholas will read it too, I've not a doubt, and aunt Elizabeth, and Ruth Ashe. Ruth has a baby, sir, a boy, and I am godmother. And I should not wonder if my mother showed it to Mrs. Franklyn or the rector, if they came down to the school-house."

"It is you who are quizzing now, Joan!"

"Don't be curious, sir. Have you not letters of your own, and more than enough, that you should want my mother's? Don't your own please you?"

"They are capital little letters, dear little letters—but what a *lot* there must be in this!"

Joan laughed merrily at his unction. "A *lot* indeed! A *lot* of guide-book, a *lot* of domestic, chiefly about a churn: a *lot* of spring with a Swiss ploughman in it, and a *lot* of Swiss cooks and housemaids. And a little religion."

Basil quietly possessed himself of the roll again :

“ If that's all, certainly I may read it ? ”

“ No, no, you may not always have your own way—I have not. Give it me back, Basil—*please*.”

“ You ought to tell me everything, like a father-confessor, Joan. What a wicked little rebel against authority it is ! ”

“ I will, sir, when you are a father-confessor ; ” and she still gently persisting, he relinquished his prey, but with a profession of vast injury and ill-usage. “ You don't mean it,” says she. And they were ever so foolish after the manner of lovers.

The next evening in the same place, at the same hour, pursuing the same occupation of needlework and idle talk, Basil must needs hark back on the subject of the papers. “ Seriously, Basil ? ” asked Joan. He just nodded his “ Yes,” and up rose she from her seat, with a mischievous sparkle in her eyes, and sped indoors. After the lapse of five minutes or less, she returned, bringing the old book cover in which she stored her notes, and laid it on

his knee. It was a corpulent repository now, and its contents had to be held in with a band.

“There is my diary from the beginning, sir, and much good may it do you!” said she.

He blushed at the great confidence he had extorted, and said, “Nay, Joan, I don’t think I was serious—only half serious. I must not turn your little tender heart inside out.”

“There is nothing of my heart there, sir. There are dates and events and such things. You deserve to read every tiresome line of it for your sins of suspicion against me!”

“My darling!”

The tone of the remonstrance was touching, but Joan would not be touched. She made him quite a stern face, slipped the band from the papers, and displayed them herself. “Look here, and here, and here—written at twelve, at thirteen, at fourteen, in bad ink to begin with, and faded to pale yellow some of it now. All that before ever I saw you, and not a word but might be read out at Ashford Town Cross”—(grasping the substance of several stout volumes in her defiant little fist)—

"And this since. I began a new quire that day—Will it please your honour to study it?"

"*That day*—what day?" whispered Basil, and his peace is made in the meeting of their eyes.

"As if you did not know," says she, and they fall to turning over the papers together—she showing him a record here and there, as having a possible interest for him beyond others. He remarked on their brevity and conciseness. "I can fill up the outlines by memory," replied she. "Do you think I shall ever forget to-night, though three lines will be enough to mark it in my journal? It will rise before me like a picture whenever I call it—so will all the happy times I spend near you."

"You speak as if they might end, those happy times, and we have no more of them together, Joan?"

"I don't know. Have you never felt how unreal great expectations are, and how dream-like our life is?"

"What has come over my sweet-heart? I don't understand her in this pensive mood. Come, let

us put by these baby annals, and have done with work too. There's the moon rising! Let us have a row on the lake;" Basil spoke quickly, eagerly, very kindly. It was true, he did not understand Joan's pensive mood; it troubled him, he would fain away with it. The sympathetic echoes within him were at present all for hope and joy and gladness.

But Joan declined the moonlight excursion on the water. She would go indoors and sing if he liked, and he could smoke his pipe on the terrace. Joan was very indulgent to Basil's pipes; indeed, her godmother said she did her best to spoil him. "He is too glorious for me, Joan; he expects to harness all the world to his chariot-wheels." But Joan found no fault in him, or she loved him for his very faults' sake. And she did not spoil him or indulge him more than other women were inclined to do. From his babyhood upwards he had been petted and worshipped by them for his beauty, brilliancy, and goodness. And she at whose feet he laid the best of these, was not likely to stint her adoration.

The old brown book-cover and its redundant contents had been thrown down on the grass, and espying them as he was taking his leave for the night, Basil chose to consider Joan's menace in earnest, and carried them off to his inn. There he conned over all that she had written since the May morning when first they met, and many a laugh had he over the entries. "The dear child! The innocent darling! The wicked, shrewd sprite!" ejaculated he from time to time, and once, "Ah! I will have my revenge for that! I will be even with you for this, my beauty!" If there was anything that pricked his self-love, he was right-served for prying into what was never meant for him—it was almost as bad as listening at a door. He could keep very close counsel himself when it so pleased him. The passages concerning Emmot Torre amused him vastly. How well he remembered the meeting of those two pairs of beautiful eyes! But when he carried Joan's property back, he did not tell her that he was acquainted with the fatal enchantress. He had a manly reverence for her purity, and Emmot was of the syren-order

of women that she ought not to know or talk about. It would not have delighted her either to hear of those casual Lilies and Roses with which youthful love had embellished his wanderings past—their season was over, and it would be mere wantonness to mar his present summer by strewing it with those colourless and faded flowers. Joan never sought any confidence but what he offered her—was glad to listen always, but was very diffident of asking questions. But, in fact, he did not keep anything from her that it was good or necessary for her to know. He had never desired any woman for his wife until he saw her; and as he was her first love, so she was his first serious passion.

They were exquisitely happy together. Joan's godmother looked on and strove to be no more anxious, and the blind curate, after a long walk and talk with her lover, told his fair reader that the young man would make his mark in the world. Basil believed he should, and certainly meant it. One day he said so with such vehemence and ardour that Joan's secret little thought came forth

—and one of those little quarrels which are the renewal of love ensued on its betrayal.

“ I fancy I see you vanishing out of my sight,” said she, and looked wistfully away into the clouds.

“ Women never arrive at a true sense of the proportion of things,” replied he energetically. “ You are not afraid of me, but you are afraid of what belongs to your idea of me. My dear child, you need have no fears at all. Your mental perspective is quite wrong if you imagine that your figure is diminished in the atmosphere of Whinmore. I am never there but I think how well you will grace the old house, and me too. Our picture has the place of honour in my study there. But if you are disquieted by visions of grandeur, I’ll tell you, Joan, it is on the cards that you may have a poor man for your husband when all’s said and done ! ”

“ Basil, I will never, *never* be your wife to your hindrance ! ” cried Joan with intense feeling.

“ You never shall, I promise you, Joan,” responded he, purposely misunderstanding her.

“ Ah, you know what I mean—if you have to choose between me and Colonel Godfrey’s displeasure you must leave me.”

“ Oh, the beautiful humility ! Joan’s love in one scale, an old man’s anger in the other ! I am not made for self-sacrifice of that sort, sweetheart, if you are. Don’t let your imagination revel in feasts of tears and magnanimity,—how dare you tell me to my face that you are prepared to be unfaithful ? ”

“ Don’t jest at me, dear Basil——”

“ I am not jesting—I was never in better earnest. I don’t know where you have conjured the thought from that I could ever let you go ! I’ll tell you what I’ll never do for you, Joan—I’ll never rob a church, or betray my country, or foul my own honour ; but I will live and die true to you as a true man can live and die to the woman he entirely loves. And I don’t deserve that you should stab me with a doubt ! ”

“ No, Basil, no ! ” cried she moved to tears by his passion. “ I never will again, my love, never again ! ”

“ You had a doubt then ? ” grasping her hands, and holding her before him. “ How much have you suspected me, Joan ? Some one has slandered me to you—do I seem to set such store by the vulgar good things of the world as to be ready on the first temptation to exchange them for love and faith and honour ? I who can dine contentedly on a crust, and sleep on the bare ground ? ”

“ Spare me, Basil ! I did not know how poor and mean my thought was,” pleaded she weeping for shame.

“ Because it came to you masked as a generous and noble thing. Well, sweetheart, it is not that, and never let it deceive you again. I love you, but that is hard to forgive. My enemy could not asperse me by a baser suspicion. I trust you with implicit trust, and your confidence wavers like a reed in the wind. Did my sister betray to you my boyish vagaries ? She might have told you too that I never longed for any woman as I long for you. Did she tell you I was fickle and unstable ? Or is it your own fancies you have

listened to ?—that I might love you a little, and throw you by not to miss a better chance—that perhaps I am counting the cost, and grudging it, when I give you my heart ? ”

Joan’s head drooped. “ Basil,” said she, “ you have humiliated me enough—let me go now.”

“ No ! Don’t you see that I rage because I love you so, and you have dealt disloyally with me.”

“ Is it disloyal to prefer your good before my own ? Then women are always disloyal when they love most.”

“ You sophist,” cried Basil, but his voice was breaking into tenderness again.

“ I will not reason with you any longer, Basil, I will only—only—love you.” The last words were so faint that he hardly caught their sound. but he knew them by the tremulous movement of her lips, and the storm of tears that followed. And what could he do but forgive her and comfort her, and condemn his own violence ?

As the sky is clearer and the earth brighter after rain, so their atmosphere was lightened by

the dispersion of what was a cloud, though a cloud no bigger than a man's hand. Mrs. Paget detected the traces of the storm on Joan's face, and when she entreated explanation, Joan gave it.

"Ah, my dear," said the old lady pathetically, "I am sure he believes in himself, and you cannot do more wisely now than believe in him too."

XLII.

A SUMMONS HOME.

THE lovers had enjoyed each other's almost daily companionship for several weeks, and September was beginning to tint the leaves with autumn when the post one morning brought Joan a letter from her cousin Nicholas Kempe. He wrote to tell her that her father, after ailing some time, had fallen seriously ill, and was quite unable to continue his duties in the school; and that nursing him and anxiety together were too trying for her mother to endure much longer without assistance and comfort. There was not any immediate danger for the master; nevertheless, he thought it was her duty, and he believed it would be her wish, to come home if she could in any way be spared.

The sudden flush of colour in Joan's face and the rising of tears into her eyes warned Mrs. Paget of something amiss. "I must go home," said she, "now, at once;" and the curate raised his sightless eyes at the trembling in her voice.

"What is the matter, child? Give me the letter to read—yes, there is no doubt but you must go," said her godmother, and then explained the reason why to her son. There was but one opinion as to her going.

"We know of what help you can be in time of trouble, and will not keep you from your father, Joan," said the curate. "But you need not rush off in such haste as to make yourself ill. We must find you an escort—you cannot travel all the way alone."

"I think I could—I should have no fear; or Basil might go with me, tho' it would cut short his holiday."

"Mr. Godfrey?" echoed the old lady. "Leave that to us, my dear; we shall be able to devise something between now and Monday. To-day is Saturday—you cannot start before Monday, but

you can write and say you are coming. Now don't work yourself into a fever of impatience—if you begin to fret I shall be quite angry! It takes so of our strength, and recollect what a long tiring journey you have before you. What is the use of all my good bringing-up of you if you are to shiver and shake like that when there is most need you should have your nerves and wits in good working order?" Mrs. Paget spoke testily; the prospect of losing her right hand worried her; she was ageing, and began to feel small cares a great burthen; but her testiness did better for Joan at the moment than a sentimental effusion. It compelled her to master herself, and prepare for her task with quietness and confidence, and made her think of ways and means to reserve her strength.

While she was writing her letter, Basil Godfrey came in, and Joan announced her summons home. He was discomposed for a moment; he too had received a summons from his uncle at Baden, and was come to announce his early retreat from Geneva; the old man begged for his company during the last week of his holiday, and he did not

know how to disappoint him—he must not disappoint him.

“Certainly not,” said Mrs. Paget, and then she mentioned the necessity that Joan should have protection on her journey, at any rate as far as Dover.

“Of course, she must—I will go with her myself,” replied Basil, brightening again; but reading an expression of demur in Mrs. Paget’s face, he added that it would be easy to find her another companion as well in some Swiss lady going to England as governess—indeed, he believed he knew of one.

Whether he knew of one at the moment or not is immaterial; he had discovered one before the evening, and had made all the necessary arrangements. She was a middle-aged single lady, a minister’s daughter, a pleasant, cultivated, sensible woman, who was extremely thankful to get her travelling expenses paid in consideration of giving her escort to a young person going home to her sick father.

The delay till Monday weighed heavily on Joan’s

conscience. She would have flown home if she could. That Sunday between the arrival of Nicholas Kempe's letter and the start from Geneva was the longest she had ever spent, though it was spent in the dearest company in the world. Basil Godfrey was there all the day. Mr. Paget had conceived a strong liking and admiration for the young favourite of fortune, and he had been allowed the run of the house, so that he would be greatly missed. As for the blank Joan's absence would create nobody liked to think of it. The Swiss lady visited Mrs. Paget in the afternoon, and received some formal instructions respecting her charge, and said twice, the obtuse woman! that there was no *why* that Mr. Godfrey should give himself the fatigues of the journey to England, she had made it once, three times, and again. Basil begged her not to trouble herself—he had his *why* for the journey; Joan herself volunteered to dispense with his escort much as she wished it, but he told her to be still, and not deprive him of a pleasure.

“Who knows when we shall see each other again as we do here?” said he.

That question gave Joan some perplexed thoughts. Who knew, indeed? Their intercourse at Ashford had never been free—was it ever likely to be free there? She took her leave of Mr. and Mrs. Paget with an almost passionate regret. She did not disguise from herself, nor did they tempt her to believe that she would ever return to her place by their hearth. Her place and her duty would henceforward be elsewhere. Her godmother saw her go with an indefinable fear and sorrow.

“She knows there is trouble before her, but she does not know how much, or of what sort—I wish I did,” mused the old lady, and fell to moralizing on the intractable obstacles which are always cropping up in life to separate friends. “I cannot follow her,” she thought; “and perhaps if I could, I might be perfectly helpless to save her a single ache or pain of heart. I see how events will go—Oh, now I wish Basil had but his pen and his wits again. I should not feel such a dread for her if he were but a little poor or unlucky.”

Perhaps her present dread would have been dissipated too if she could have seen how considerate

and good he was to Joan by the way. The Swiss lady almost fell in love with him herself. “ Ah, how happy you must be in that beautiful young man ! How he adores you ! ” cried she to her blooming companion, and Joan, who had not the countenance to deny it, blushed a joyous acquiescence, and did not relapse into the contemplation of her home sorrows for some minutes after. When would the time come that she should be always so tended and taken care of ?

There was no unnecessary loitering on the road, but two nights of rest Basil Godfrey insisted upon ; and when he had convoyed his treasure to Dover, and seen her safe with her other guardian in the train, and their faces set towards London, he went to his inn, and waited for the next boat back to France. Joan had now the upper hand, and in spite of remonstrance and persuasion, would go on by the night mail northwards. The Swiss lady yielded reluctantly—she wanted dutifully to redeem all her pledges of care to that angel of a lover ; but Joan refused to be stayed, and they travelled together to the great midland junction, whence,

amongst a score of others, a branch line struck off to Whorlstone. And here, in the sunrise of a lovely morning, they parted—the respectable governess going forward to her situation with some great folks in Yorkshire, and Joan, after a long term of waiting, being carried by the first train up amongst the wooded hills and dales of the Hundred of Whorlstone.

She had been little more than a year away, but a year seems a long time in a young life. Ah! how her heart beat and her eyes kindled at the familiar beauty of each remembered scene! There was the moorland beyond which lay Dethic where she had gone with Basil and her father. There was the square tower of Whorlstone, and the Delve where lilies grew so thick in spring.

As soon as she reached the old mining town, she walked off quickly to “The Dial” in the Market Place, followed by a porter wheeling her luggage. The landlord was sunning himself at the door with a pipe after his breakfast, and recognized her coming up. Nicholas Kempe had asked him to look out for her, and help her forward.

“Miss Abbott, I’m right glad to see you,” said he. “Your cousin Nicholas told me as how you might be here to-day. Your father’s mortal bad, but I’ve not heard as he’s worse. You’ll be wanting to get home as quick as you can. I’ll have the spring-cart round in five minutes, and James shall drive you over to Ashford. Step in an’ talk to my missis till it’s ready.”

“Thank you, Morris, but I will wait here.” The Market Place was as solitary almost as a hill-top—fitter for her far just then than the buxom landlady’s parlour and gossip.

XLIII.

JOAN'S COMING HOME AGAIN.

It was a strange, sad coming home again to Joan. She had dreamed her day-dreams about it, but they were always of warm, eager, joyous welcome—never like this. When the cart stopt at the garden-gate, the door was shut, the house silent. The man who had driven her from Whorlstone turned his head, and looked up at the master's chamber-window where the white curtains were closely drawn. The sun was shining on the wall, on the porch, where the leaves were changing to drop at the first frost. She lifted the latch and entered the house-place. The fire had burnt low, but everything was neat and in order, though without the natural signs of busy, happy occupation. The driver brought in her boxes, and set them

down gently on the floor, and spoke in a whisper as she paid him. He was heard, however, and a step came from the room above out upon the landing, and a voice asked over the stair-rail, "Who's there?" It was her mother's voice, and Joan answered: "It is me, mother;" and the next moment they were kissing and crying together, for the sorrowful cause and manner of their meeting.

"Thou's lost no time, my bairn—Father's sleeping now. He lies awake mostly o' nights, an' in the morning he drops off into a doze." As Mistress Abbott spoke her tender motherly hands were loosing Joan's bonnet, lifting off her cloak, smoothing her ruffled hair. "Thou looks tired, an' well thou may, travelling so far! See, I'll set th' kettle on, an' a cup o' tea 'ull refresh thee. It's drawing towards noon, an' dinner-time."

Then Joan unshod her feet, and trod lightly up the stairs, and looked in at the good school-master lying death-stricken on his bed. He did not stir, and with pitiful tears in her eyes, she passed on into her own dear old room. It looked

like a kind, familiar friend, and she smiled in its face—she could not help smiling for all the ache at her heart and the weariness of her flesh! She sat down in the rocking-chair by the window, and looked round restfully at her childish possessions. Everything was just as she left it—the hard little narrow bed covered with the shell-patterned quilt, smelling of lavender, and white as a snow-drift: the scarlet-edged bookshelves, and their home-staying tenants, even the doll's cup and saucer that had been her inkstand. Joan knew that her mother had been to and fro the room that morning, rubbing and dusting, keeping all fresh and sweet and clean for her. The window stood open, and the air, which had here a keen touch of autumn in it already, wafted from the sill the perfume of a bushy lemon-scented geranium. Her cousin Nicholas had given it to her as a slip, and it had thriven all this time. And beyond it, in the sunshine, were the water-meads and the cattle-bridge.

Presently her mother called to her softly from the stair's foot to come, for her tea was ready.

The master was still sleeping, and she went down with noiseless tread, her shoes in her hand, and put them on by the brightened fire. Her mother watched her, spread bread-and-butter for her, boiled her a newly-laid egg, brought out her best of everything, made her a little feast, and was thankful to see that she had her appetite. "For," said she, "it is never light work nursing; it takes o' the spirit, an' the body too, most particular if it's nursing them 'at belongs to you."

And then she began to tell at length how the master had been stricken. How a drowsiness had come over him, and a loss of memory, and Parson Franklyn had insisted on his having a holiday and doctor's advice, and had provided a substitute for him in the school, a Whorlstone man who was writing-master at St. Giles, till Mr. Gerrard Spencer came home, and who was wanting a place, and had a bedroom up at Nicholas Kempe's. How he talked of Joan, his dear little lass, as if she were a child again, and would not understand that she was further away than playing in the garden or the meadows, and would bid them call her in. How

he had given up leading the choir at church, and then going to church at all, and how one day, sitting in his chair at the table-end with his books before him (though it was his wife's belief that he never read a page latterly) he had given a cry, and fallen back helpless, and become as she saw him.

“Th' doctor says he don't suffer, an' I hope it's true, but there's an anxious look in his face that he did not use to have, an' I doubt that's pain,” concluded the tender, sad, soul tremulously.

Joan wiped her eyes many times during the recital, and wished she had come sooner.

“Nay,” replied her mother. “Friends said better not, while it could be helped. There's not too much at home wi' him sick, an' it's a different life to that thou's accustomed to lead.”

“Oh, mother, I can do anything, and do with anything,” cried Joan eagerly.

“Hush, bairn, or thou'll waken him. Let him sleep while he can; he's clearer after a sleep I think, an' happen he'll know thee then, tho' it's not many he knows. Thou'll do thy best, an' it's

glad o' thy coming I am, Joan, very glad ;" and they kissed and embraced again with tears that did them good.

It was not until well on in the afternoon that the master roused. Joan had sat down where his opening eyes must fall upon her, and with a rallying sense of courtesy he murmured a "good-day" to the imaginary visitor.

"Don't you remember me, father?" said she, and came and bent tenderly over him.

He looked at her vaguely, and then at his wife who added : "It's our Joan, father, come home to help me take care o' you."

"Let the little lass be—let her gather her flowers ; there's time enough yet," murmured he.

"Didn't you bid me call her in ? she's willing to come," said his wife taking up the thread of his perplexed fancies.

"Aye, aye, she was always a docile, loving lass, an' it's them goes first. I don't know why we bring up childer to lose 'em when they're beginning to be a comfort. But as the Scriptor says : 'The Lord gave, an' the Lord taketh away,' and tho'

it be our one ewe lamb, we must answer, 'Blessed be the name o' the Lord!'"

"It's no use, bairn, he's wandering; go, lie thee down, an' rest a bit," urged the mother pathetically; and Joan, vainly trying to smother her sobs, flung herself on her bed, and cried as if her heart would break, for grief that she had ever left father and mother to come home again a stranger.

The sound of her weeping reached her father's ears. The passionate, quick voice touched some chord of memory, and he knew it for his daughter's. "Is the little lass in trouble?" he inquired of his wife. "What ails her to cry like that? Joan! Joan! come an' tell father." His dim vision was, perhaps, of a bee that had stung her once, of some broken toy, or hard lesson, but it was always of *her* as a child. He recognised the tall, graceful woman who came running at his call no more than he had recognised her before.

With the evening dusk Nicholas Kempe arrived. He had been like a son to Reuben Abbott and his wife since they had been alone, and was at all

times welcome as one. Joan was downstairs by the hearth alone when he walked in, and she rose quickly with outstretched hand to meet him.

“Oh, Nicholas, my mother’s been telling me how good you are! Father does not know me, I’ve been so long away!” was her greeting cry.

“He’s dim o’ sight since his stroke, cousin Joan, an’ you’re that different, somehow, I’m not sure I should ha’ known you myself if you hadn’t spoke, and my eyes is not to complain on,” said the blacksmith, admiring her shyly, confusedly, by the uncertain flash and flicker of the fire.

She dropt into the lang-settle corner again, and sat silent, gazing into the red embers, and feeling, oh, so inexpressibly sad! Nicholas did not attempt to engage her in talk. He understood her sorrow in part, but did not dare to try and comfort her, lest he should say too much, or what he ought not to say. His little cousin was still the star of his devotion, though he knew now that she had a more favoured and accepted lover, and he could never, never be any-

thing to her but the friend and brother he was already.

Nicholas mounted the old stair that creaked and groaned under his feet, and released his aunt from her watch. Now was the time that she was used to take some rest, lying on Joan's bed till after midnight, when Nicholas gave up his post to her again, and slept on the settle in the house-place till the morning.

"Thou'll not need to stay, nephew, after to-night since Joan's come," Mistress Abbott said before she went away; "she'll take her turn wi' me at sitting up. I'll go an' keep her company a bit, an' then I'll send her to her bed. She was journeying all the night, poor bairn, an' her heart's sore that father doesn't heed her now she's here."

Nicholas acquiesced with a grave nod, and disposed himself with his book and the candle behind the shadow of the curtain to read the hours of his vigil away. But it was not much he read for the first of those hours. Joan's tired, mournful face came again and again between his eyes and the

page. And he could hear the soft hum of her voice and her mother's sounding from the house-place, below the master's chamber.

"Father spoke as if I'd been dead—lost to you, mother, since I went away," Joan said plaintively. "If I'd thought it would have felt like that, I would never have gone."

"Whisht, bairn, whisht! What's been was done for the best, an' the Lord 'ull turn it as pleases Him—for the best too, I've ne'er a doubt. Thou's overset wi' fatigue, an' sick wi' grieving. Come the morrow, after thou's rested an' slept, an' thou'll have a better heart to bear what's laid upon us.

"Do you think father will never know me again?"

"Ay, for sure, he'll know thee! He's like as if his soul went an' came in him. One while he'll be far away, an' another while he'll be with us, an' talk o' good things as parson himself can't talk finer. But thou an' I has had talk enough for to-night. Come to bed, an' let thy mother undress thee. Thy eyes is heavy wi' sleep."

Joan went to her chamber nothing loth. The burthen of youthful weariness and drowsiness was upon her, and she hardly heeded the tender caresses of the loving hands that unclothed her, and shook out her beautiful hair.

“It’s thicker an’ bonnier than ever,” said the fond mother, and lifted a tress to her lips. And Joan’s cheek had hardly touched the coarse, homespun, fragrant pillow, before she was in dreamland with a half-said prayer on her lips. She was still in the deep sleep of healthful youth when her mother, between twelve and one, took her turn to watch in the master’s room, and sent Nicholas below to stretch himself on the settle. And she had not awakened when her cousin conveyed himself home at dawn, nor when her mother looked in at her two hours later, and all the village was up and astir.

The sun was shining brightly through her white chamber when she opened her eyes with sudden recollection. But her courage and strength were restored by her long, perfect rest, and when she stood up on her feet she looked and felt herself

again—able and helpful, and ready to be a stay and comfort to all who needed them.

Mistress Abbott heard her daughter moving, and came to her. “Mother,” said Joan, “are my cotton frocks that I left at home still in being? I should like to put one on while I am about the house in the morning—and my aprons.”

“As for thy aprons, Joan, I wore them out myself, thinking they’d be o’ no more use to thee, but thy frocks is in the kist. And being produced, a little crumpled with long lying in the folds, Joan chose the last made of them, and came out of her chamber, the peasant maid of two years ago, ready for any work that wanted doing.

“Father ’ull know thee like that, I shouldn’t wonder,” said her mother, “an’ I shall feel more at home with thee myself, Joan. I love th’ old fashions best—or rather Ashford fashions better nor France.”

To Joan’s intense relief and happiness her father did know her, and called her by her name when she carried him his breakfast and waited

upon him. "Surely I've been dreaming that you'd gone away, Joan, for there you are," he said, in a puzzled, inquiring way.

"Yes, father, here I am, and you'll not miss me any more," replied she, in her cheerfullest voice.

"I'm glad of it. It does me good only to see thy dear face, and you'll comfort mother. It's hard work with me lying here, tho' poor Nicholas does his best. She wishes oftentimes that you could have fancied him instead of the other, but it can't be helped now."

Poor Joan knew what *other* her father meant, and she was mute. Whatever might have been once, that wish of her mother's was certainly long past praying for !

XLIV.

QUIET CHANGES.

“JOAN ABBOTT has come home, Edward,” announced Mrs. Franklyn, when her husband joined her at luncheon that day.

“So-I heard in the village—and the proper place for her,” said the rector curtly.

“You have not seen her?”

“No, I shall go in to visit the master this afternoon, and no doubt I shall find her too. Doctor Bennett is of opinion that he may linger on for weeks or even months, but that he will never be of any more use in the school. Hilton might as well have a promise of the place at once. He is an excellent teacher, and I should not like to lose him.”

“I hope the Abbotts will not be turned out of the house while the master lives?”

"No, no, of course they will not, but I'm afraid they will be badly off when he drops; pity the girl has not learnt to do something sensible, to earn money, and help her parents."

"If she goes back to the Pagets, they ought to pay her a salary."

"And how will your brother like that, my dear? Basil would rather his lady-love did not work for wages, I imagine."

"That is nonsense, Edward; you work for wages yourself—and so does the Bishop, and the Chief Justice, and the Lord Chancellor."

"And the shoe-black, and the gate-porter, and the kitchen-slut. So much for your argument, Nelly! You had better go with me this afternoon—and you will find out if there is any need; I suspect there is, from something Bennett said."

In pursuance of this agreement, about half-past three o'clock the rector and his wife knocked at the master's door, which was opened by Joan herself—by Joan disguised in one of her old cotton frocks, and busy with smoothing-irons on the others.

“ You did not expect visitors so soon, did you, Joan ? ” said Mrs. Franklyn in relief of the vivid blush that greeted their apparition.

But Joan was not blushing for her dress or her occupation, and her answer was perfectly ready and simple : “ Nay, I have had nothing but visitors all day, and I think my frocks will never get ironed,” said she, and smiled and set them chairs at a distance from the fire where her tools were heating. “ The little Hubbards came to bring father some jelly, and the squire sent him a partridge. And Ruth Ashe has been over with my godson ; and cousin Nicholas was in at noon, and Mr. Hilton before school.”

“ And now *we* have come,” added the rector, who liked to see her fluttered and not ashamed. He disapproved of his brother-in-law’s romantic engagement, but he could not disapprove of Joan. She went upstairs presently to prepare her father for the clergyman’s visit, and in her absence Mrs. Franklyn, who had been just a little mortified in her mind by Joan’s appearance, whispered to her husband confidentially that it would be quite

as well if she had a little more pride. "Of what sort?" asked he cynically. "Of what sort, my dear?"

When Joan returned, the rector left her with his wife, and after a shy moment of mutual contemplation they kissed each other, and were intimate. They talked of Basil at Geneva, at Oxford, at home, of Basil everywhere.

"He is doing splendidly at Oxford. The rector says he will take the highest honours. I think, Joan, he works hard, quite as much for love of you as of his work itself or of what may result from it," says his sister.

"Mr. Paget was mightily pleased with him; he declares it is a pity so fine a genius should be a country squire," cries Joan.

"Ah, but he will be a great deal more than a country squire! We that live shall see it."

And so they exalted their hero and were happy, and the rector's wife went away more Joan's partisan than ever.

"I tell you what, Edward, I don't think Basil would ever have been what he is but for her,"

cries she to the opposing faction as they mount the hill on their road home.

“What is he, my dear?” asks the rector with his cool, sarcastic, disconcerting air.

“Did you notice the ring on her hand? I shall treat her as a sister; he gave her his pledge voluntarily, and it is my firm conviction that whatever may hinder or delay him, he will be true to her to the last; and she deserves that he should!”

“You are in love with her yourself, Nelly.”

“So I am!” Indeed Joan’s simplicity, sincerity, beauty, and adoration of Basil had covered her with a cloud of glory in which her old cotton gown was quite invisible to his sister’s eyes. She had even forgotten to be jealous, and had tacitly yielded to her rival the first place in his heart, which had been hers since they were children together.

When his wife’s enthusiasm was a little abated, Mr. Franklyn asked if she had verified his and Dr. Bennett’s fears that there was want in the old school-master’s house. She had not—she had been full of other things, but she dared venture to

hope they were mistaken ; if they were right, Joan was still in the dark, for she gave no hint of it.

Joan was in the dark, soon, however, to be enlightened ; for the facts were as the physician and the rector apprehended. It was the underlying knowledge of them that set the stamp of pain on the master's face, whether conscious or unconscious. It was the certainty of coming poverty that had stricken him down, and laid him where he was. Like many another poor man, he had risked the small economies of a laborious lifetime to make them a little more, and had lost all. He had sold his guidebooks to the publisher, and embarked the produce, with a couple of hundred pounds that he had saved besides, in a speculation that foundered as soon as it was launched. He had never dared to tell his wife, and the miserable secret was killing him. Nicholas Kempe had half discovered, half guessed it, but neither did he speak of it to his aunt. All the provision the old man had been able to make for her in the twenty years of their married life was gone in a moment, and

unless his kinsfolk did it to spare the disgrace, the parish might bury him.

It was to his daughter the master opened his burthened mind at last. On the second night after her arrival at home, her mother being gone to rest, and she left to watch with him alone, he called to her softly, and made as if he had a great and private matter to tell her. His face looked death-pale in the faint light, and she knelt down by the pillow to bring hers nearer, feeling quite calm herself, and equal to whatever there might be for her to hear. She had such a perfect trust and dependence upon God that her heart was never disquieted long together. She had discerned that something lay heavy on her father's mind, and she had discerned that since his recognition of her in the morning that heaviness had decreased, and that he would give her his confidence at a safe opportunity. That opportunity was now here, and he told her what he had unadvisedly done, and his anxieties for her mother.

“She'll have only you to look to, Joan, when I'm gone—promise me, my lass, that you'll take

care of her," he said with a very pathos of supplication ; and Joan with tender, earnest love vowed that she would never leave her, but would work for her and keep her all the days of her life.

When she rose from her knees, where she remained for some minutes after, she set herself to think how she should compass what she had undertaken. Mrs. Paget had fed her, clothed her, used her in all respects like a daughter, and her services had been the services of affection. She had a little money in her purse left over of her travelling expenses, but it was very little. Her good godmother and tutor had enough to live but nothing to spare, and Joan's private allowance had been not much more than the name of the thing. Her first bout of meditation produced no plan, no idea whatever, but she was wiser than to wear her strength with fretting. Perhaps the morning might bring counsel. Meanwhile, she took a sheet of paper, and overflowed to Basil, and, ah, what present comfort that was ! He had been so good, so kind to her on that sorrowful journey home that she did not fear to tell him anything,

and did not fear either that he would press on her advice or help that she ought not to accept from him.

And she judged him rightly. The next post from Germany brought her a long letter, very tender, consoling, and considerate. He had heard from his sister, also, he said, and Joan must go to her when she needed a friend's assistance. He would see her again before Christmas, and then they would talk out all the difficulties that perplexed her. He should not mind her returning to Mr. and Mrs. Paget on whatever terms, but he wished her not to go amongst strangers, and would prefer that she remained with her mother and at Ashford. Then he went on to discuss quite plainly what she had told him of the necessity she had to earn money, and said, he could put her in the way of that, he thought, without injury to her modest reserve. She could write good English, and could she not translate French and German? He knew a bookseller in town who would give her some employment in that line, and from what he had read of her diary, he was sure

she might turn her notes and observations, both home and foreign, to account in short sketches for the magazines,* and he named one where he knew they would have a fair chance of acceptance. And then he told her what sort of bits would work up well into such sketches, and concluded the matter by saying that but for the hearty confidence he had that she would not be spoilt thereby, he should not be so ready to set her in the paths of independence.

Joan communicated this portion of her lover's letter to her father, and that night with his dim eyes watching her, she set to work as she was bidden, and her wits being bright and clear for joy, she accomplished a short story, founded on a little incident of her life in Rome. Full of hope, the next day she despatched it to the conductor of the magazine that Basil had mentioned, which had a green cover—the colour of hope. And every night in her watch-time, and many an hour of the day, she plied her pen, and was quite absorbed and happy in her toils.

“It's wonderful how folks can wrap themselves

up and away from trouble in their books," her mother said. "But it don't seem to me the natural thing for a woman. Your father was that way; nothing could put him out when he was busy wi' his writing an' stuff."

"It is out of my writing and stuff I mean to conjure bread and cheese for us," said Joan affectionately.

"Aye, then, I doubt but we shall have often to go wi' short commons," was the answer:—not meant to be discouraging, though it was.

And Joan, after the first flush of hope, had her doubts as well as her mother. The editor of the green magazine made no sign. She gave him a week—a fortnight, but he was dumb still. Ah, she thought, if he knew! Well, he had plenty of thorns of that sort in his cushion. Basil wrote that she was not to be downcast or impatient. Editors were but mortal men, not able to bear beyond a certain amount of voluntary contributions, amongst which hers would come; and so she hoped on to the month's end, when she received a number of the magazine with her piece

in it, a slip of paper worth six guineas, and an invitation to continue her sketches, conveyed in a letter so kind and appreciatory that Joan shed some bright drops on it for gratitude to the writer, who probably had written dozens such to other young aspirants in literature, and would write as many more. She displayed the cheque to her father, and "Aye," said he, "but 'twas easy earned;" and the morning being splendidly fresh and fair, she walked all the way to Whorlstone by herself to get it cashed at the bank there.

It happened that Mr. Franklyn was in Whorlstone that day, on business with his brother clergyman, Mr. Spencer, and as he crossed the market-place from St. Giles's to "The Dial," where he had put up his pony, he saw Joan coming out of the bank. She was simply attired in a black and white striped spun silk dress, a black shawl, and straw bonnet, but from the foreign air of them, and her own natural elegance, looked somebody quite distinguished in the humdrum country-town. The rector met her, shook hands and lifted his hat, conscious of the courtesy,

and equally conscious that he would not have paid it to his schoolmaster's daughter in her old cotton frock. And yet he was a gentleman as little under the influence of clothes as are most. Perhaps it was his old Toryism. Joan was not without humour, and she knew as well as Mr. Franklyn himself how he regarded her, and how difficult it was for him to treat her as anything more than a good girl who had unfortunately been educated out of her station.

In reply to Joan's letter to Geneva announcing her discovery of her little gold mine, Mr. and Mrs. Paget wrote back that there was a great deal of spending in a hundred pounds at Ashford for any one who knew how to manage money, and that they were exceedingly relieved and rejoiced to hear that she had a chance of supporting herself without leaving her mother. When the time came (as come it soon must) that they had to leave the school-house, they wished them to take up their lodgings in the crow's-nest, and that Joan should pursue her reading by means of the curate's library. When the occasion for further change

arrived, matters might be re-arranged. Mrs. Paget believed that what she suggested would meet Mr. Godfrey's approval; and Joan was to remember that in all her future movements, he had a right—perhaps the first right—to be consulted. Mr. Paget had found a new reader in a young gentleman who was studying at Geneva, and it was not improbable that, as they were comfortably settled with house and servants, they might stay the winter there. And finally, they missed Joan more and more every day; but she was in the path of duty, and they prayed God for her continually that it might be always as plain before her as it was now.

“Thou has made some true friends, Joan,” her mother said when she was told the proposal about the crow's-nest. “And what a load it 'ull be off father's mind! He was talking that we should have to move into Whorlstone.”

Mistress Abbott had had the keeping of the cottage in the absence of the owners, and it was precisely as they left it—aired, dry, clean, and ready for re-occupation any hour. Joan had gone

over the pleasant familiar old rooms more than once, and when the master was informed of Mrs. Paget's proposal, he was as much relieved as his wife expected he would be. I have been told that the heaviest burthen on a man's mind dying is having to leave those he has loved helpless and unprovided for in the world. Since Joan's coming home her father had taken hope and comfort from her courage and capability. The further knowledge that she and her mother would not have to remove amongst strangers as soon as he was gone, added to his peace.

XLV.

FALSE ENCHANTMENTS.

BASIL GODFREY was still at Baden, whither he had gone direct after convoying Joan to England. Her sudden departure from Geneva had set free more than a fortnight of his vacation, and this he generously proposed to bestow on the Colonel. His kinsman said with a good-natured sarcasm that he was much obliged to him, and begged to know why he had come so soon. Basil frankly told him that Joan was gone home, and why.

“She is a good girl, and feels her duty no doubt,” responded Colonel Godfrey.

“I had not seen her for a year—she is sweeter and dearer than ever, sir,” exclaimed the lover, catching at this straw of conciliation. He was sincerely desirous of winning his uncle’s good-will

for Joan, though he was quite prepared to dispense with it if it could not be won.

“I knew a very sweet and dear girl too before I went out to India—but I came back and married your Aunt Maria.”

“Don’t you ever regret, sir, that you did not marry the sweet and dear girl first?” asked Basil audaciously.

“No man marries in that foolish way after he has cut his wise teeth—until they drop out maybe. I was in hopes your Joan?—Joan Abbott—would see reason, and send you about your business. I have heard about her—yes, I have inquired about her if you like, and I am willing to believe that she is all that is admirable and lovely in her own sphere; I admit that you might have married her without any remarkable condescension a year and a half ago; but I want you to consider whether she will be quite at home amongst our Whinmore neighbours—with my Lady Harbinger and my Lady Hobbes.”

“Sir, I propose to marry my wife to please myself, and not the county dames,” responded

Basil with a resolution and dignity that made Colonel Godfrey laugh, and vote that they should drop the subject for another year. "I am willing to do so, if we cannot yet agree upon it," said the young man, and the subject was dropt accordingly without being envenomed by the exchange of any harsh words.

This conversation took place within an hour of Basil's arrival at Baden, and was not renewed, though the two were constantly together, and on the best terms. The Colonel had many friends there of the better sort, and amongst them General Vyvian. Basil was not transported with joy when he encountered the fair Emmot in his first ride with his uncle, but her blushing and beaming countenance expressed a most flattering delight. General Vyvian was riding with her, and was her constant and proud companion. She had acquired a complete mastery over him and his somnolent wife, and was become quite the ruling power in their party, but it was by pleasant arts. Was goodness developing in the girl? She had given up studying her beauty, her whims, and her

humours, and was at the beck of Lady Vyvian or any one else whom she could amuse. It was surprising how natural cleverness supplied or concealed her deficiencies, and with what a ready wit she turned her little stock of knowledge to account. But the foolishlest words were pretty as pearls dropt from such ruby lips. Perhaps she was rather too lively, too full of animal spirits, and she would certainly have gathered a court about her of anything but desirable admirers, had she possessed a less able and repulsive watch-dog than General Vyvian, for a rumour had got abroad that she was not only a young lady of his family, but that she was the only heiress of his fortune, and that if she made a match to please him, he would make a daughter of her.

All this Basil Godfrey heard from his uncle before he had been twelve hours in Baden, and though not prone to such practices, the Colonel seemed to wish his nephew to regard the young lady favourably. With abundant money, an intelligent maid, and Parisian toilettes, it will be understood that the enchantress had prevailed

over every outward and visible sign of her inferior breeding. She was a magnificent young woman, of a daring spirit and frank speech ; in every way exuberant, and to many men fascinating. But Basil Godfrey had quite another taste, had his imagination filled with quite another vision. Emmot spread her toils for him in vain. Her admiration did not move him, nor her pathos either. He was a stock and a stone for her, and nothing more. He smoked his cigar beside her out of doors, and listened to her talk, as she contrived that he should listen nearly every day, with the most calm and negligent indifference. He would not see that she pursued him—would not even take the trouble to avoid her. She was almost open with him—not quite : and it is certain that she would have charmed him more had she shown him less. The little comedy at Ashford Feast was a frequent theme for her allusions when no one else was by, and as he never noticed the brazen butterfly of his own accord, she one day called his attention to it nestled in the muslin ruffles of her dress.

“ I keep it,” said she, “ for the sake of the times when I was the happiest.”

“ Your heart must be fearfully and wonderfully made,” replied Basil with a dark look in her face.

Emmot gasped for confusion—she had wanted to make a pretty sentimental speech, and he had taken it as an invitation to open a sepulchre. For several days after this rebuff she avoided him. She felt that she was powerless to fascinate him—that he knew too much about her. She thought he was good, brave, upright, and though virtue had no abstract charm for her she could not escape from her fate. He haunted her fancy day and night, and she recklessly indulged her fancy. There was a little while when she would have stript off all her gauds to follow him barefooted through the world. She met him quietly, constrainedly, and left him to dream the maddest dreams. She wondered, did he ever throw her a thought. Yes, but it was as hard as a stone.

General Vyvian gave her a gentle hint more than once that her play was too open—no doubt, many saw her weakness and the vanity of it. His

wife told her plainly it was of no use ; she was spending her labour for nought. “ Mr. Godfrey is a match for your betters, my child, and I am not sure that his heart is disengaged. Win him if you can, but I give you my word that I think you are flying at too high game. The General has a little estate at Standen—it is the Manor House, a dull, cold, country, and dull, frozen people, my dear, proud and pompous beyond conception. The heir to Whinmore is quite a personage amongst them, and may aspire to anybody’s daughter. We spent last Christmas there, and I suppose we may spend next Christmas there ; then you can judge for yourself whether you are not wasting time.”

Colonel Godfrey gave his thoughts no tongue. He was of the old-fashioned school of courtesy, and not well learnt in the feline devices of women ; he sentimentally pitied Emmot, and was extraordinarily kind to her. He thought his nephew very insensible for so young a man. All his susceptibilities, indeed, were in a state of absorption, and no woman was beautiful for him but one.

He pictured Joan to himself a score times a day engaged in her offices of love and duty, and wished he could fly to her help. And a score times a day he vexed himself with a half-defined regret at the distance conventional social rules set them apart.

This distance had never come home to him so forcibly as it came now when she was in trouble and perplexity, and he could not conveniently be near her. He sounded his sister as to the feasibility of a visit to the rectory before he went back to Oxford, but Nelly was inhospitably discouraging. She told him that Joan had so much on her hands and mind, at present, that she was probably better and happier left quite to her own people—perhaps he might come and see her at the end of the Michaelmas term.

“I shall certainly see her, then,” quoth he a little resentfully. He had learnt that it was from the rector and his wife that Colonel Godfrey had made his inquiries respecting Joan, and he was of opinion that they had not praised her half enough.

With a lover in this mood no false enchantments were likely to prevail ; and early in October Syren Emmot watched him ride away with the mortifying consciousness that she had failed to plant a single dart in any joint of his armour.

XLVI.

ON A WINTER'S NIGHT.

OCTOBER passed heavily in the master's house, and winter began. The old man lingered, growing weaker, but without pain, and usually clear in his mind; he always recognized the rush of the boys out of school at twelve and four. Joan fell soon into the routine of home under its altered aspect. She had resumed her place at the organ in church, and went up to practise and rest her heart for an hour nearly every day. And on Sunday she attended both services. She was not to be called unhappy, but care had begun, and real sorrow. There had been a little while soon after her return, when she believed her father would recover, and be himself again, but that hope had quite vanished now. Nor had Mistress Abbott perhaps ever perfectly realized

her approaching calamity until some time after her daughter came home ; and now the tender, faithful woman had seasons of almost uncontrollable anguish in view of it. It was often as much as Joan could do, with all her strength and courage, to keep up and perform the duties required of her. She compelled herself to be constantly busy to stave off fretting, and when work would not do it, she betook herself to her knees. She never wrote much about her trials to any one. She took it into her head that Basil did not like pathetic letters, and she saved her bright gleams for him, lest she should distress and distract his mind, set on hard study. She too, like him, regretted the distance between them ; and she began to find out that love is not all in the world even for women.

Unfortunately she had little countenance or comfort of Basil's sister, as both had hoped and intended ; for before the end of October, there was trouble at the parsonage. The children took the scarlet fever, and brisk little toddling Miss Bess died ; and while the child lay still unburied, Mr.

Franklyn fell ill. Olive and Mervyn were sent away to the south with the nurse, and as soon as the rector was able to move, he and his wife went to join their children, and finally settled at Torquay for the winter. Joan had not even an opportunity of taking leave. Everybody was warned away from the infected house, and Mrs. Franklyn never came outside the door after her child's death until she left it with her husband. Joan saw the chaise driving down the hill, that carried them away, but the occupants were hidden in their mourning and grief, and did not notice the anxious face on the watch for even but a little wave of the hand in token of remembrance and farewell. In fact, they did not recollect her till they were past the wood yard and the mill.

The stranger, Mr. Notley, who came to serve the parish in Mr. Franklyn's absence, was obliged to establish his family, which was very large, in Whorlstone, and came and went as his duties called him. He was very little there—naturally, he had not the interest in the place that he might have felt had it been his permanent cure. He was

a busy man too, with many irons in the fire, and the utmost difficulty in keeping it alight and finding bread enough to fill the mouths of his ten hungry children. Time was not elastic enough for all he wanted to compress into it, and he was always in a hurry. The master did not relish his visits;—they were strictly professional, and the old man was too far gone to take kindly to a new confessor.

But it was not for many days more that he needed earthly ministrations. The nipping frosts of December set in. There was snow over hill and valley, and icicles were hanging to every ridge. On the second Sunday of the month, the afternoon service being over, and Mr. Notley and the congregation gone, Joan lingered for some time in the sheltered porch, looking far away upon the white world under, and the sky whence the early dark was falling. She had somehow a disinclination to leave that scene of silence for the house, close and gloomy with the shadow of death. A revulsion against pain, against suffering, came over her, arising from an almost intolerable physical fatigue. She felt as if she could bear no more, as if she

must rest and let all go, whatever might come after. She was overwrought, and every sense was dulled. How many nights was it since she had had one of good sleep? She could have slept that afternoon, but she had to be at the organ. When she returned to the house, the need to be helpful here, comforting there, alive to her father's wants and her mother's distresses, would keep her nervously alert. She gave her own mind, put her own hand to whatever was to be done. No wonder the working poor think of heaven chiefly as a place of rest!

They could spare her perhaps a little while longer, she thought; her cousin Nicholas was with them. She sat down in the most sheltered corner of the porch, the wind in the yew-tree piped a lullaby, and she sank into a deep slumber. She woke suddenly, and with a start, at a voice calling, "Joan, Joan!" She did not hear it any more after she sprang up. She was greatly refreshed, and did not know how long she had been lost to consciousness, but it would have been dark save for the rising moon.

"I must have been dreaming that some one called me," she said, and hastened from the churchyard, and up the lane. The windows of the "Red Lion" were full of fire and candlelight, and every cottage window glowed. She looked up at the ghostly old cross as she passed it, and thought how many things changed, but that never. All the village was shut indoors, for the wind was keen and the frost was keen, and she met never a soul until she came to her own house-door; and there stood her mother looking out for her, and wondering why she delayed.

"Come, my joy, father's been wanting thee. Where has thou been all this while?" asked she.

"I was tired and fell asleep in the church porch, and woke at somebody calling me," replied Joan, entering the house-place, and standing in the bright warm light of the hearth.

"Father called thee dreely ten minutes ago. He's quiet now, an' Nicholas is with him."

Joan looked round at the clock. It was on the stroke of seven, and she must have slept two hours, at least, out in the cold. But she was none the

worse for it, and when she had swallowed a cup of tea, she begged her mother to go and take some rest, and went herself to relieve or share Nicholas's watch. The master for the last two or three days had lain in a lethargic state that was neither sleeping nor waking; he had spoken little, but had given signs that he knew what was said before him. As Joan came up to the bedside, he looked at her faintly and smiled, his lips forming some words that she understood to be, "Where's mother?" Joan said she had gone to lie down, and he answered audibly, "You'll take care of her, remember." Receiving a cheerful, tender assurance that she would, he closed his eyes, and seemed to sink into a doze. There was never any weeping in his sight now; tears had distressed and perplexed him beyond his own pain, and a bright look from Joan made him happy.

"It won't be long now, cousin Joan, he gets weaker and weaker," said Nicholas Kempe, presently, and Joan, dwelling on the dear old face, echoed, "No, it won't be long now."

About eight o'clock Mistress Abbott rejoined

them. She could not rest, she said, away from the master. "Sing us thy Sunday songs, Joan, to put the night on ; 'appen he'll not hear thee, but the angels, come another Sabbath ;" and, sitting on the side of the bed, the loving woman took the feeble hand that had been her support and guide so long.

Joan retreated into the shadow, away from the fire and candle-light, and after a little pause to rally her strength began to sing ; first the simple old hymns of her childhood ; then one she had learnt in Germany, the earlier verses set to a dirge-like, wailing melody, but closing with a burst of religious joy.

We have no hope save Thee, O Christ, consoler,
We have no hope save Thee !
The night is dark, the way is long and lonely,
No star, no guide, we trust, but Thee, Thee only.

We have no help save Thee, O Christ, Redeemer,
We have no help save Thee !
We weep, we pray with fervent supplication,
We cry aloud, be Thou our mediation !

We know that Thou art near, O Christ, our Saviour,
We know that Thou art near !
The Jordan swells, the billows foam and toss,
But still we see the watch fires of the Cross.

And there is dawn behind, O Christ in glory,
Great light and holy calm !
They who have won that happy morning shore,
Strive not, nor weep, nor faint for evermore.

Thine are they and yet ours, O God our Father,
Ours still by bonds of love !
Dear kindred gone to paradise, gone home ;
Call us, O Death, O Lord, and we will come !

Nicholas Kempe bent for a minute over the master, and as Joan's voice ceased, he said, " He's out o' hearing, the good old master ; he's gone, yes, he's gone ! "

XLVII.

THE CLOUDS RETURN AFTER THE RAIN.

THE day after her father died, Joan received a letter from Basil Godfrey to the effect that as the rectory was deserted, and he could not spend his Christmas there, and as Joan's difficulties had arranged themselves, he would defer coming to Ashford for the present, and would go to town to his uncle for the holidays. Joan tried not to feel the disappointment too much; she had half anticipated it since the departure of Mr. and Mrs. Franklyn; and, as she reflected, when Basil wrote, he did not know of her great bereavement.

Her chief occupation was gone now, and she could sit with book or pen in her hand all day. Dr. Bennett counselled her to let her mother go

about the house as her wont was, and not to give her time for grieving, by taking work from her. There was time enough for grieving' when the night came, and they sat over the fire together, and talked of him that was gone. Nicholas Kempe joined them most evenings, and Joan had always a gentle welcome for him. His aunt said to him once, pathetically, that she thought he might find better company, but he did not accept the hint. As long as Joan would let him, he was her most loyal servant.

The day of the funeral arrived and passed; then the day of removal from the school-house to the crow's-nest, and it would be hard to say which was the more trying to the poor widow. Everything rested with Joan and Nicholas to advise and do. She earned the money that paid for all, and when her little purse got low, she only thought there was more to be found where that came from. Sordid anxieties never pestered her. She translated when she was dull, and wrote her original sketches when she was bright. It was an easy life, with very long days, and perfectly mono-

tonous, as are the lives of most women left to themselves.

Joan found it not at all unhappy. She never thought of it as lasting long, but only as leading up to times when all would again be joy and sunshine with her. She had Basil's letters, a perennial spring of hope, and her own to write. And she had pleasure in her work, and a little laughing pride too. If she could only have had a change of company now and then, she would have needed nothing more. And that came presently in the person of Elizabeth Seamer and her young sister-in-law, Lexcey Spencer that was. John Seamer when he gave up his fellowship on his marriage, got a college living in the Hundred of Whorlstone—Cricklade, a village not quite three miles beyond Ashleigh-on-the-Hill. Basil Godfrey took his tutor into his confidence concerning his engagement to the late schoolmaster's daughter at Ashford, and asked him to let his women-folk show her a little kindness if it fell in their power. They made an opportunity, and called at the crow's-nest one afternoon as they

drove back home in Lexcey's pony carriage, after a long morning visit at St. Giles's. Basil had told Joan how he had bespoken their countenance for her, and she received them with the bright grace which characterized her—so would she have received any friend who came to her in his name. They were charmed with her, and carried home a report so glowing that John Seamer, who had looked on the affair as a most foolish entanglement, was moved by curiosity to go too, and was conquered like his wife and sister.

Mrs. John Seamer had her occupations and interests growing round her at home, but Elizabeth, her visitor, had leisure to spare, and a taste for long constitutional walks. She met Joan Abbott once by chance on the Ashleigh road—(Joan had been to Ashleigh to kiss her little godson and her cousin Ruth)—and they met several times again by appointment.

During one of their walks and talks in company, the whole story of Emmot Torre came out, and Joan heard how the enchantress was enacting the great lady in quite high circles both at home and

abroad; she heard also the painful episode of young Gerrard Spencer's passion; and she heard finally what she had much better never have heard—that Emmot had conceived a grand caprice for Basil Godfrey, and did not hide it.

A sudden check and sob on Joan's part warned Elizabeth that she had been unwisely confidential.

“From the first moment I saw that woman I had a presentiment that she would bring me misfortune,” cried Joan, flushing from brow to chin, and then she was sorry she had spoken.

Elizabeth fancied that Joan sought her conversation less after this incident; at all events, they did not meet so frequently as before, and when they did meet, they kept wide of that subject. Joan never again alluded to Emmot: it would be too much to say that she never thought of her. She did think of her, and speculated on her opportunities of seeing Basil, and also why Basil had never named Emmot's name to her. She was secretly ashamed of the pertinacity with which the idea haunted her mind. She tried to banish it, but it returned in defiance of her endeavours

and her good resolutions. Why had blind fortune set him up on a pinnacle of wealth, and raised Emmot too, and left her lowly?

Was Emmot in London at Christmas when Basil went to spend his holiday there, and did not come to her? He was back again at Oxford now, laborious as the most conscientious, poorest student; but his letters never failed of length or pleasantness or punctuality. They came true to the day as the sun rose, and were full of the most comforting loving-kindness. He could not care for Emmot with her bold eyes, or he would not write so to her. Yet there crept into her letters something of pain and restlessness, which he instantly detected.

“She has too much upon her, my poor darling,” he said, considering them. “I wish—I know what I wish. I ought to have gone to her at Christmas. How awkward and tiresome circumstances are for us!” And then he bethought him of his friend John Seamer at Cricklade, and wrote to ask if his dear little wife would give him a couple of days’ lodging at Easter. Only too

glad, wrote Lexcey in answer, and Basil went without warning Joan, resolved on giving her a joyful surprise. It was almost a pity, for as luck would have it, he made his journey for nought, and did not see her. The blinds were down and the door locked at the crow's-nest, and a little damsel, passing from the Hurst to the village, informed him that Mistress Abbott and her daughter had gone to visit their relations who lived up somewhere in the High Peak.

They were gone to Eyam. When Basil returned to Oxford he found a letter from Joan announcing and explaining the movement. It was reasonable and right enough, but he felt unreasonably thwarted, vexed, disappointed, and he wrote to her while in that mood. And unfortunately again his letter reached her when she had new sorrow to bear, and almost more than she was able.

It had been a long-cherished desire of Mistress Abbott to see again the place where she was young. The master had promised and put her off for many and many a season, and in all the twenty years

of their married life she had never been back to what she still called *home*. Her grief, which had been heavy and passive at first, woke up when April showers began to fall, and spring airs to breathe. She was unsettled, disquieted, almost fretful. Joan comforted and tended her unwearingly, and when her health visibly suffered, spoke of sending for Dr. Bennett. Then with tearful, beseeching eyes her mother said she wanted to go home, she could not rest till she went home.

“You shall go—we will set off to-morrow!” cried Joan with prompt indulgence. She wondered in her own mind whether twenty years after she went away from Ashford, her heart would yearn to it, as her mother’s did to Eyam. Yes—she should always love the cattle-bridge and the evenings in the water-meads.

The morrow was the Thursday before Easter, and quite early in the morning Mistress Abbott was ready in her Sunday suit of crape and stuff to set out on her pilgrimage. Joan did not delay her. She was extraordinarily anxious to gratify her mother, please her, make her happy again.

She was willing not to look beyond the immediate present at all, so that she had her desire. Was it from an undefined fear that she would not have her very long to cherish? She believed so afterwards, remembering how entirely she let herself go with her mother's wishes. Joan would have had the spring-cart from "The Dial," and would have made the journey at ease; but, No, said Mistress Abbott, it would save money to walk, and she had always been used to walking and not riding—many was the time that she had walked from Eyam to Bakewell and back, and from Eyam to Castleton, where her grandmother lived, when she was a lass.

So they locked up the house and left it to take care of itself, and Joan with her travelling-bag, and her mother with her basket and provisions for the way, started on their journey. They compassed twelve miles before dusk, and rested and slept the first night at a little road-side inn. In the morning it rained, and they went to prayers in the nearest village church; and in the afternoon it cleared, and they made good way again, and

on Saturday about noon they came to Stoney Middleton, dreary, arid, decayed in the world. In the changeable spring atmosphere, the scenery was often wild and charming, and Joan thought there were many less agreeable modes of travelling than this that her mother preferred.

From Stoney Middleton onwards every step of the way was familiar to Mistress Abbott. The great rocks stand fast and do not change. Spring renews their graceful garb of leaf and fern, and the sun shines on them as it did a hundred years ago. But it was too early yet for much beauty; the wrinkled old heads were grey and bald, the wind in the narrow valley remembered Christmas, and the ash-trees were bare.

“ ’Twas this time o’ year when your father took me away, Joan,” said the widow; “ but there was snaw on the hills—there’s no snaw now. The winters was terrible long an’ hard when I was young.”

“ Worse than they are now, mother ? ” asked Joan, who loved to hear her talk of those times.

“ It seems to me that they were. But th’ winter

never got into th' master's house as it did into ours. There's more o' winter for them that's poor than for them that's well-to-do, my bairn; an' going from Eyam to Ashford was like going to riches. There was never want under your father's roof. He was a good man to me, an' took me when I'd but a sore heart to give him, so he did; an' never threw a hard word at me from that day to the day o' his death, tho' help fretting I could not, an' happen didn't try."

Joan perceived that her mother had one story that she had never heard. "Why had you a sore heart, mother, and why did you fret?" said she, though she could guess why well enough.

"It's not long to tell, nor strange either, but it overcomes me yet. Thy father was getting to be an oldish man when we were wed—I loved him as a good wife should, but I'd loved Ralph before."

"And how came you to part, mother, you and Ralph?"

"It was the will o' God parted us, my bairn, an' not our own. An awful accident befel one day i' the Langside Pits—he was not in the mine

when it happened, but volunteers was called for to resky any that was left alive. All the towns about flocked to the edge, an' I was there wi' Ralph, who turns to me all a-glow an' asks, Shall *he* volunteer? An' I says to him, 'Yes, or never look me i' the face again!' for I'd a bould spirit for a lass—an' he kissed me, an' after a longish minute that he kep' holding my hand, he started away sudden, an' wi' two more, was let down into the pit. Oh, bairn, an' the wild-fire burst out again——”

There was a pause, a silence broken by sobs. Joan wept for that old bereavement with even more tears than her mother. Mistress Abbott recovered her voice the first: “When they was brought to bank his poor mother knew him,—none but her! An' he was buried next day in Eyam churchyard. An' I think half my heart was buried wi' him, an' it's that draws me home.”

Joan thought to herself: “It would be so with me if Basil died.”

Presently her mother spoke again. “Let me finish my story since I've begun it. I lost Ralph

i' the spring o' the year, an' i' the summer father died ; an' when winter came, who was there to find us i' bread ? We pined, an' a many pined—we was *very* poor. Your father was writing his books then, an' picking up the tales an' songs o' the country-side, an' he fell in wi' me when we was at the worst, an' I cared na' much for ought. He asked me to be his wife, and I did na' say nay. An' wonderful patient an' good he was wi' me that tried him often, an' above a bit, when we came first together."

"And you were very good to him, mother—and I'm sure you loved him, for I loved you both ; and they say children do not love their parents who do not love each other. I think that must be true."

"Who should I ha' loved but him that was so fond o' me, when I'd lost Ralph ?" was the piteous response.

In a deep narrow lane branching off from the main road, and shut in by lofty rocks, Mistress Abbott wished to rest awhile ; for they were getting near home, she said, and she was tired. Joan

saw it with anxiety; her mother was not only tired, but she was quite shaken and unnerved by recalling the old, long sorrow of her life. "I wish cousin Nicholas were here with us," Joan thought—in any distress, she remembered the kind helpfulness of cousin Nicholas. But he was not there, and she considered in what place they should go lodge:—the village inns were always noisy of nights, and a quiet shelter was their need.

They were provided for—taken care of. As they walked up the village in the quiet afternoon, Joan looking out for what she had little expectation of finding, and her mother leaning heavily on her arm, she saw a kind-visaged woman at the garden-gate of a neat stone cottage raised several steps above the road. Mistress Abbott had kinsfolk still in Eyam, but only, as she phrased it, "in a poor way, and strangers to her," and Joan had desired that they might come and go independently of these unknown relatives. Something, however, in the woman's inquiring look made her stop and speak. Could she tell them of a decent lodging where they might be taken in for a few days?

“*Surely* you’re Joan Kempe’s daughter ! an’ is this your mother that married Reuben Abbott, Whorlstone way ?” was the friendly exclamation in reply.

The widow raised her eyes. “Aye,” said she, “I was Joan Kempe—an’ do you recklect Ralph Sydall ?”

The stranger glanced at Joan, whose visage expressed her trouble and apprehension. “I recklect you both ; I’m a sort o’ kin to all Eyam. My father kep’ the ‘ Old Black Bull ’ for a matter o’ forty year ; his father kep’ it afore him, an’ his son keeps it now. You’d get taken in and well done to there, for th’ wife’s a tidy body, but if you like it better, I’ve two upstairs chambers that I lets i’ the summer to artises an’ tourists, an’ you’re welcome to un, that you are, for a trifle. My name’s Spence, Libby Spence ; you knew my father, Mistress Abbott, an’ you ought to know me.”

“Twenty years is a long time, Libby. I’m not clear that I do mind you,” responded Mistress Abbott.

“She is just overdone, miss,” said Libby to

Joan, and at a mute, tearful sign from the girl, she helped the widow up the steps into the cottage, where the luxury of cleanliness reigned supreme.

The kettle was singing on the hob, the cat was purring on the hearth, soon tea was spread on the round table. Joan helped her mother, and spoke softly to her, and presently, when she seemed to be sinking into a lethargy of fatigue, she persuaded her to go to rest in one of Libby Spence's primitive white beds, and with a feeling of relief and comfort saw her fall into a deep, refreshing slumber, from which Libby predicted she would awake in the morning all right.

"You are very good—you are like a friend," said Joan, with a rush of grateful tears in her eyes.

Sitting by the lattice which commanded the village street and the church-tower, Joan wrote her letter to Basil Godfrey, and another to Mrs. Paget, who was still at Geneva, and a third to her cousin Nicholas; and afterwards at Libby's invitation, she spent an hour by her fire-side, listening to the tales and traditions of Eyam

—languidly at first, but by-and-by with the vivid interest natural to her in all chronicles of noble life and death. Libby was gratified exceedingly, and remarked that Joan reminded her of what her father used to be—far fonder of stories and old stones than of living and present things—“Leastwise until he married your mother,” concluded she with prompt and courteous self-reminder.

Joan smiled at the exception. “Yes,” said she, “my father was her true lover—if she had ever a rival in his heart it was the Cross in Whorlstone churchyard. He was one of the excellent of the earth, was my dear father.” She spoke with infinite tenderness; a little compunction for him visited her mind betweenwhiles with pity and sympathy for her mother and her first, lost love.

Libby had a fine flow of natural eloquence, and moved her audience without effort as she told her tales and commented on them. She was pleased to see that she could draw away Joan’s mind from half-formed fears about her mother, dwelling on which could only weaken her if any real need for exertion arose.

“Folks is always for explaining God’s providence, but I tek it, there’s very few o’ his privy council,” said she. “Sun shines on the evil, an’ on the good ; rain falls on the just an’ the unjust. One event happens to all men. They may say, ‘Here’s a judgment o’ God’ an’ ‘There’s a judgment o’ God,’ but who can tell that it isn’t a mercy? Them that died o’ the plague at Eyam, was they more wicked than all that dwelt i’ the Peak? In that whirlwind o’ death was the good grain spared, an’ the chaff only winnowed away? Nay, bairns died, an’ babes that knew no sin. When destruction came, folks began to look at home an’ remember their iniquities. Some o’ the auldest recklected of a poor Cathlic gentleman, by the name o’ Garlick, that had been taken at Padley Hall, an’ that they’d stoned as he was brought through Eyam—it was as far back as the end o’ Queen Elizabeth’s days. But the younger folks looked no further than th’ last Wakes’ Sunday, when some wanton lads drove a coo into church while parson an’ people was at prayers.”

“And a profane act it was ; I hope the parson

had them set in the stocks?" said Joan as Libby paused for breath.

"There's stocks in Eyam yet, so mebbe he did—I can't speak for certain as to that. But it's commonly told, an' I believe it to be the true tale, that the pest was brought from London in a box o' tailors' patterns an' old clothes; for the man that opened it, George Vicars, felt a waft o' noisome breath as he lifted the lid, an' was smitten wi' a horrible sickness. The third day the plague spot was on his breast, an' in the night he died—the first of two hundred and fifty-nine persons that died of the pest in Eyam, whose names may be read in the parish register."

"I have heard my mother say there are graves everywhere."

"There are,—in your field, an' in your garden, under your hearth, an' under your barn. A gravestone's your threshold, an' a gravestone's paving to your well. Go on the moor, they're there; go into Cussy Dell, they're there. Mrs. Mompesson lies i' the churchyard (she was the parson's wife—only a young woman o' six-an'-twenty, an' she left

two little bairns), but most o' them that died was buried in lone places near—each fam'ly burying its own dead, while any was left that could; an' when none was left, a man called Marshall Howe, for the bed an' clothes they died in, did it. A wild fellow he was, an' dared to make a jest o' his awful work, telling th' folks when he'd buried one that hadn't led as good a life as he might, that he'd seen Old Nick grinning an' waiting for him on the rocks above Cussy Dell; but after the pest took off his wife an' his son, he did not talk like that any more."

"A limit was drawn round the village, beyond which no one might come nor go, and the parson gave up having service in the church when it was at the worst, did he not?"

"Yes, the folks were just shut up wi' death, an' they bided it well. Parson Mompesson had prayers twice a week i' the Delf—you'll have heard your mother talk o' the Delf? It's a beautiful spot, full o' trees, an' the brook runs down through the Salt Pan, as we ca' it, along the bottom of the Delf into Middleton Dale. Parson

used to stand under an arch o' rock—Cucklet Church is its name to this day—an' the people sat apart on the opposite side o' the hill where it rises like steps, to hear him preach. Eh! but it was an awful time!”

“My mother has a tale of two lovers that always made me cry as she told it when I was younger.”

“Aye. The lad belonged to Middleton and the lass to Eyam. When they was forbid to meet, he used to go upo' the summer nights on the moor, where he could see the town an' her home. He watched for long after the pest had carried her off, and first news he had of it was from a shepherd lad who met him on the hill, an' said: ‘Oh, Rowland, thy Emmot's dead an' buried in the Cussy Dell!’”

“Don't let us talk any more about it, or I shall dream of death!” cried Joan, and shuddered closer to the fire.

“You've had a bringing-up, an' know all about histry, I dessay,” resumed Libby on a new track. “P'raps you don't know tho' that John Bradshaw,

as judged King Charles's head to be cut off, was of a Eyam family—there's letters o' the Manor Pew yet, F. B. for his feyther Francis, an' J. B. for hisself. It's nothing to be proud on."

"No," responded Joan solemnly, and then inquired something about the Primitive Methodists at Eyam.

"Why the Methodys came? Sure if I can tell—'cause the Lord sent 'em, I suppose! We'd good parsons, an' bad 'uns, an' parsons that was nayther good nor bad. There was Stanley and Mompesson good, an' Peter Cunninghame as there was strange tales told on; an' there was Finch, rector for twenty year, that hardly ever saw the parish; an' that scamp Joe Hunt, who married a lass o' Ferns at 'The Miners' Arms' when he was drunk, an' lived for years i' the vestry o' the church to avoid th' bailiffs. I take it Eyam folk were a rough, wild lot, wi' no religion much among 'em at all. What religion could they have wi' Michael Barber parish-clerk for nine-an'-fifty years? A profound astrologer he was, an' made no secret o' serving the devil. One day he was

walking with a Middleton man doun Hunger Hill Lane, when they sees two teams a-ploughing in a field. Says the man fra' Middleton, 'Michal, if you can make yon two teams stop, I'll believe in your power.' Michael sets to work wi' his incantations, an' presently one o' the teams stands still; t'other keeps on. 'I can't stop that 'un,' says Michael. 'How so?' says t'other. ''Cause ploughman said his prayers to morn, an' I maunt fight agen God.' A pretty fellow *that* for parish clerk, an' no wonder Methodises were sent or any other plague. 'You're dark, dark, dark in Eyam!' quo' the first that came to give 'em a sermon, but they'd be saved by church or nought, an' just drove him out wi' stones and curses. Mathew Mayer was his name, fro' Stockport, an' he took the law of 'em."

The cottage clock struck eight; Joan looked up with a long sigh of fatigue, and it being dusk out of doors, Libby Spence drew the curtains, and proposed an adjournment of her old-world stories in favour of bed; saying that she never lit a candle when she could help it, and she saw miss would

be better for a long night's rest. Joan returned to her mother, whom she found still sleeping, but while she stood by the bed looking down on her, her eyes opened, and she said, "There's the jagger's bell—Ralph promised to buy me a comb when he came round again." Then recognizing her daughter and rousing herself, she added, "My mind keeps running on old times, Joan, I don't know what ails me. I've been dreaming I was at home, an' the jagger was coming; an' warn't I glad! He came fro' Sheffield wi' his goods on pack-horses, and bells to their collars—we could hear 'em ever so far off—an' he brought us all manner o' things. What should set me thinking o' the jagger, I wonder?"

To Joan's grief her mother was in no haste to sleep again, but rather disposed to talk. And in her talk she wandered strangely, as quite aged people will whose memories are broken. She went through many a reminiscence of her childhood, of her father and mother, her brothers and sisters, but always came back to Ralph Sydall. Till past midnight Joan listened, and answered, and sym-

pathized, and grew weary and more weary ; and, at last, recollecting how her mother was always careful and unselfish for those she loved, she professed to be woefully tired, said her prayers aloud kneeling by the bed, and suggested that it was time for both to go to sleep. The habit of considerateness prevailed, and the poor widow bade her go at once. "An' if I'm a bit restless an' dreaming don't heed me, my joy," said she. "I'll not disturb thee, an' I can help it." And whether she waked or slept, she was still until the morning ; and when Joan came to her then, she was sitting up by the window dressed.

Libby Spence made them a breakfast, and soon the church bells began to ring for service. "There they go, the auld bells," said Mistress Abbott. "One says, like Ashleigh bell, 'God be our speed,' an' t'other says, 'God save His Church.' Hark, Joan, don't you hear 'em ? I love the bells."

They went to the morning prayers, and sat as strangers by the door. The sun shone in, and shone on the crowded graves of the churchyard, and the runic cross grey with twelve centuries of

age and weather. There was no stone to mark the resting-place of Ralph Sydall, but her mother showed Joan where his body had been laid, close under the church-wall. The grass grew there, wild and rank as on a thousand graves besides. After this she was no more excited. She went hither and thither about the village, saw many former friends to whom she said that she was only come to say good-bye, showed Joan the pretty spots or the dreary which were the background of her stories, and on the evening announced that she would wish on the morrow to go back to Ashford and the master.

Joan was surprised, but would not gainsay her. She could not tell what latent disappointment and sense of strangeness in the old familiar places might be pressing on her mother's heart. Libby Spence said musingly that she had got a look of the other world, and since she wished it, it would be best to risk the fatigue, and take her home. To lessen the toil, the good soul insisted on her brother driving them to Whorlstone in his shandry, and from Whorlstone, in the gleamy April evening,

they walked to the crow's-nest. As the widow crossed the threshold, she said, "Thank God, we are at home again, an' my poor heart's at rest. 'Appen Ralph knows that I've been to look at the spot where they laid him; I could not abide that he should think I had forgotten it. Now I'll never wish to stir more till I'm laid myself by my good old master i' the churchyard."

Very thankful too was Joan to be at home, and to see the kind face of her cousin Nicholas peering in at the parlour window in the dusk to discover if they were come. From him she heard that Basil Godfrey had been seen in Ashford on Good Friday afternoon—news that filled her with mingled gladness and regret—gladness that he should have sought her; regret that she should have missed him. But it was not until the following Thursday morning that she had any word of his visit from himself; and when his letter came, she was wrestling with fresh sorrow, and almost more than she could bear. That which Libby Spence had foreseen had happened. Her mother after a vain, ineffectual struggle, had suddenly given way and

fallen ill. She lay now delirious with fever, and Dr. Bennett spoke with much gravity of the possible issue. The wandering and restlessness which had given Joan such disquiet, had been the incubation of the disease now burning away the oil of life with ravenous flame.

Joan kissed her letter and carried it in her bosom half the day before she had time to open it, and when she did open it, and looked for comfort she found a thorn. Basil did not write harshly—that was impossible to him; but he wrote with fewer expressions of tenderness, and he wished her to remember so many things—not to draw closer the ties of kinship with humble relatives as yet unknown to her; not to make friends in the rank she must presently leave; not to make any without consulting him. He regretted that her mother had carried her to Eyam; he hoped she would make the visit short, and not repeat it. She must exercise a will and judgment of her own now, and not yield to her mother in matters that she must know he would disapprove.

“ My darling mother ! ” cried Joan, casting the letter from her with a passionate outburst of tears ; “ God do so to me and more also, if I do anything unkind by thee ! ” And then she ran to the sick room, and gave all her strength to tender filial services, and thought, oh ! if God would only spare her mother, how readily would she forego all other love but hers and His !

But God who knows best, did not take her at her word, or grant her resentful prayer. Her mother died,—died without ever more recognizing her child,—passed into shadowland babbling of shadows. And Joan felt as if suddenly the world were become an empty place.

XLVIII.

A LITTLE RIFT.

MISTRESS ABBOTT died and was buried by her old master before the showery April month was out. Elizabeth Parsley had come over to help to nurse her, and Peter and she, with Joan and Nicholas Kempe, were all the mourners at the simple funeral. Joan did not return to the crow's-nest when it was over; she went home to Ashleigh with Elizabeth, and was put in possession of the little chamber that her cousin Ruth had occupied before her marriage with Michael Ashe. She did this of her own good will and pleasure, having written to Mrs. Paget beforehand that she should do so. But she wrote to no one else. It was from his sister that Basil Godfrey heard how his dear Joan was left fatherless and motherless in

the world ; and it was from Mr. John Seamer that he heard where she had taken up her abode.

“ My wife drove over to Ashford and begged her to come to us here, but she said that she had no mind to go amongst strangers, and that she would stay with her own people,” wrote Basil’s old tutor, with an evident inkling that something was amiss with Joan. The intelligence, coming in this manner and from this quarter, struck her lover with the utmost pain and dismay. Joan had not answered his last letter, but only now did her silence acquire any peculiar significance. She had been piously fulfilling her mother’s last wishes on earth, and he had reproached her ; he had wounded that tender heart already half-broken with sorrow ; she had felt repulsed by him when she wanted kindness and cherishing most. He was enraged with himself, and full of pity, love, most earnest love for her. He threw his books aside, packed his travelling bag, and within an hour was on his way to London and the north.

And Joan ? She was just weighed to the earth with grief. Since that lamentable day when she

cast her lover's letter down in anger, she had no comfort in the thought of him.

“There is a great gulf between us, and he has not sympathy to reach across it!” said she, and pressed the thorn of his counsel into her heart until it bled.

There was her mother before her eyes, suffering, dying; there was good old Elizabeth serving her; there was Nicholas ever kind, ever gentle, bringing her gifts, going on her errands; there was dear Ruth coming over to take a night-watch to give her release:—Oh, she loved them all! she should be wicked, worthless, if ever she denied them. How could Basil bid her not strengthen such bonds of kindred? Did the great hold loosely by theirs? Her troubles made her cling fast to every hand that helped her through them. He did not know how the poor are each other's servants for love—he knew nothing but of hired service!

She put the letter away from her sight, but she could not put it out of her mind, and she would not answer it. Her stubbornness stood firm throughout that week, and maintained her in a

conviction that she had a right to be angry. Her anger was no consolation in the hour of her mother's death, but the very passion of her grief for her kept it alive. She made herself miserable for a wrong that was far more than half imaginary, and though conscience pricked her with a fear that she was not doing well by Basil in leaving him to learn her troubles from third persons, she could not bring herself to write to him. The same pride of heart made her refuse the earnest and cordial invitation of Mrs. John Seamer, which was pressed on her in Basil's name, and caused her to seek a home and protection amongst her humble kinsfolk at Ashleigh.

But three days of entire loneliness in Peter Parsley's house had given her abundant leisure to re-consider herself. Peter and Elizabeth were kindness itself, but they treated her deferentially as a lodger and a lady. They gave up to her their chilly little parlour, and never entered into the familiarities of social life in her presence. She was compelled to feel and know herself a restraint upon them. It was the same with her cousin

Ruth, only Ruth ventured on telling her plainly that she thought it would have been wiser if she had gone to Cricklade.

“It is as Michael says,” quoth the little matron, echoing her domestic oracle, “women can’t live in two worlds. You must go up and sit wi’ the silks and satins i’ Mr. Godfrey’s world, or he must come down and carry the hod in ours—that is, if you’re to be happy when you come together. An’ it seems to me, and to all of us that you’re fitter for going up than him for coming down—eddication’s carried you the best part o’ the way. Nicholas says you’re company for any gentleman, an’ nobody ’ull deny that there’s ladies i’ this very township that’s milk-maids to look at aside of you. So don’t be perverse, cousin Joan, an’ for a bit of advice that’s no harm in it, quarrel wi’ your fortune, else you’ll be sorry when you can’t help yourself.”

Joan knew that Ruth was right. Last Christmas Basil had proved to her by his absence that he felt there were barriers in the way of their intercourse very hard to overstep when she was living with

her relatives. They had talked of these difficulties together at Geneva, and on the way to England, and then she had not found cause of offence in what he said. She took out his letter and read it again. It was written a little curtly, but there was reason in it—and he did not, in fact, ask her to do any violence to existing friendships. She had been unjust in her haste—had resented an unkindness of which he was not guilty. What had she ever seen in him to make her suppose that he would tempt her into ingratitude and coldness of heart. She had done him a wrong in her anger—a grievous wrong! If he had chosen her of all women to be his wife, did she not owe consideration to his wishes, to his prejudices even? Was it—could it be that a little secret irritation arising out of Elizabeth Seamer's news of Emmot Torre had made her mind jealous, suspicious, tenacious? Blushes and tears of shame acknowledged the self-impeachment, condemned her, and witnessed her repentance.

She was sitting on the fourth morning with her writing materials before her on the rickety table

in front of the parlour-window, cogitating these things and inclining to confession, when the door behind her opened, and Elizabeth Parsley spoke. What she said Joan did not hear, for the next instant Basil Godfrey was in the room, and she was sobbing her heart out on his breast.

“You are a contrite little sinner, I’m glad to see,” was his first audible remark when there had been tears enough. “You must perform penance now, and come back with me to Cricklade—they all expect you.”

“Oh, Basil, but they are strangers,” pleaded Joan with still quivering lips. “I loved my father and mother as well as if they were the finest people in the land. Don’t say I am to go amongst strangers yet—you will not be there, shall you?”

“No, I must return to Oxford. I came away on the spur of the moment when I heard of your distress—how very wicked it was not to write to me. You don’t love me half as perfectly as I love you,” and he lifted up her abashed face, and tried to make her look at him—he did not quite believe

what he said, perhaps, but she felt that it was true, and kept her eyes averted. Oh, but she would love him better now, she would never distrust him again !

It was not altogether painful to Basil Godfrey to study the remorseful pulsations of his darling's conscience. She had seemed so sweet a piece of perfection hitherto that to discover the tiny flaw of wilfulness in her, combined with a degree of feminine unreason, only made her more dear to his masculine heart. To comfort her, caress her, protect her, was no less pleasant than to listen to her sage precepts and pious axioms. It made him feel the stronger, the superior—a sensation always flattering and agreeable.

He made her sit down in the century-old leather chair which was the pride and honour of Peter Parsley's parlour, and with a gentle touch on the crape of her dress, intimated that he shared her mourning. This opened her confidence, and she told him of the pilgrimage to Eyam, and all her mother's story, and how she had fallen ill and died in a few days : “ And I have no one

in the world so near to me now as you, Basil," she said.

"I wish you had felt that a week ago, and had sent for me. I would have come from the world's end! I want you to depend on me—why don't you trust me, Joan? You don't trust me—not entirely—you know you don't. Privileges that ought to be mine, you give to your cousin Nicholas."

"He is so good and kind, Basil, and he knows our ways. What do you know of simple poor folk? If you had come, we must have put on our best manners and best faces. Amongst ourselves we could cry at ease."

"Perhaps I know more of your ways than you imagine. Have I not lived about in the world, and travelled on foot? Joan, we will have a pedestrian tour together some day, and play at being poor again. There are drawbacks to riches and luxury, as you will find out. Why are you shaking your head? Don't you believe me?"

"Yes, I believe you."

"Then why that pale, perplexed face? We

cannot alter circumstances, but we can bend them much as we will. I will not let you turn back to doubting and fearing—you must come away with me to Cricklade.”

“Don’t say I *must*, Basil—I would so much rather stay here,” pleaded Joan, the sudden tears rising again.

Basil could not help but yield. “I will not say *must* to-day, if you cannot bear it, but that is what I wish, my darling ; to-morrow you shall tell me again how you feel about it.”

“To-morrow morning I was going to practise in the church, and to plant some flowers round the grave.”

“I will come over and go with you ; I will stay another night at Cricklade :—I cannot endure to leave you so forlorn and unhappy—this sweet, sad face would haunt me. Tell me, Joan, that if I grieved you, I am quite, *quite* forgiven.” Joan turned the sweet sad face to him, and he was sure that, however else she might have sinned against him, she did not sin in want of love.

“I walked part of the way here through a beau-

tiful wood," said he. "Come out with me there, and be cheered a little—the sunshine was lovely on the young green as I passed through. I dare say you have never crossed this threshold since you entered the house?" Joan confessed that she had not. "I thought so—a convincing proof that you are not fit to be left to yourself. I shall commission my friend Elizabeth Seamer to put you under rigorous daily discipline."

"I do not like Elizabeth Seamer," said Joan, with a strange lightning in her eyes.

"Not like poor Elizabeth?" responded Basil amazed.

"No," replied Joan decisively, but she would give no reason why. Basil teased and teased in vain to find it out: "I'll tell you when you are my confessor, perhaps," said she mischievously at last. He was so glad to see the dawn of a smile on her face again that he let her triumph once more.

They went out and walked in the Dingle together, and spent an hour in kind converse. Joan felt that she did not deserve to be so happy. Now Basil was beside her again, she had no single

doubt either of him or herself. Love made them equal ; what created the sense of distance between them was chiefly in her imagination, and in her imperfect, acquired ideas of life and society. The quickest response of mind to mind, the sweetest echo of heart to heart, was theirs. They were just true man and simple woman to each other, like the first God made, before caste was invented.

On the morrow betimes, Basil was again at Peter Parsley's cottage, and found Joan ready in the porch, waiting for him with a letter in her hand.

"There is a key solves all our perplexities," said she, and gave it to him.

The letter was from Mrs. Paget. The old lady wrote that when Joan left her seven months ago she had certainly not anticipated a speedy reunion ; but events had so turned that she and her son were now inclined to come back to England, and to take up their abode again at the crow's-nest, which Joan must, of course, consider her home until she was claimed.

Here Basil was constrained to interrupt his reading of the document to offer some of those

observations which are always new, true, and beautiful from a lover to his lady—Joan thought them most eloquent. And then they walked to Ashford along the hill tops, in the breezy spring brightness, and through the deserted rectory gardens into the churchyard. Some kind hands had been busy already at the new grave, and Joan's work was done.

“It is my cousin Nicholas—he forgets nothing,” said she, softly. “He loved my father and mother dearly.”

Basil thought it was for somebody else's sake, and no superlative merit in him. Then they went into the church, and Joan's hand on the organ and her tuneful voice woke all the familiar echoes in the dusty old fabric. Basil chose to wait in the porch, meditating on many things, until she came down to him again, singing in a prayerful undertone :—

Keep our hearts lowly, O dear Lord, our God,
Give us no joy unsanctified of Thee.
In brightest sunshine of this mortal life,
Remind us still of immortality.

We sow in confidence, bless Thou the seed,
Make it to yield for heaven a hundred fold.
Spare not to break the hard and barren soil,
So it may wave at last all burnished gold.

Give us the early and the latter rain,
Refresh us in the burthen of the day;
Let no blight harm the green and tender blade,
No tare be sown, no good ear plucked away.

We sow in gladness, bring us home in peace,
With harvest sheaves well gathered and fast bound,
The ripe full corn of hope and faith and love,
Our year with honour and abundance crowned.

“Thou sweet saint!” cried Basil, as she ceased, and the rapt devotional look passed from her face as she became conscious of him. But it was exchanged for a smile not less lovely, less tender.

They stayed there a little while, and in traversing the rectory garden again saw the gardener and his lad setting to work. The family was coming home next month, the man said, and orders had arrived the day before for putting things to rights indoors and out. This was news, and welcome news to Basil and Joan both. The

return of Mrs. Franklyn would almost certainly promote their future intercourse, and Basil promised himself a long visit to Ashford in the autumn. He would spend his vacation between the rectory and Whinmore, and unless Colonel Godfrey made a point of it, he would not go abroad at all.

With this prospect they parted for that time. Mrs. Paget had given Joan a multitude of instructions about the re-occupation of the crow's-nest, and she had to see several persons to deliver them. She was also straightly charged to see them carried out, and as that would necessitate her frequent presence on the spot, Basil gave up his wish that she should go to Cricklade. They said good-by at the wicket into the steep, hillocky field up which, once upon a time, he had watched her climbing as guide to the blind curate. She would not allow him to accompany her on her round, and she persuaded him not to wait for her; she should be hours, she said, and should forget half she had to do, if she had him on her mind as well as her business. So he watched her out of

sight, and then set off at a sharp pace to Crick-lade, and took the evening train up to town. The next morning he was back at Oxford, and Joan for all her sorrows and bereavements had ceased to feel the world a void and empty place.

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